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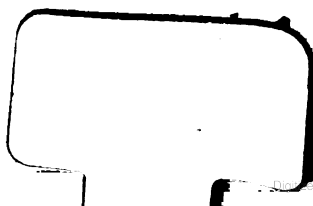
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SERMONS.

LENTEN

AND

OTHER SERMONS.

BY

HENRY W. BURROWS, B.D.

PREBENDARY OF ST. PAUL'S;
VICAR OF EDMONTON.



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I.

THE CALL OF ELISHA.

THE SUNDAY BEFORE ADVENT.

“~~What~~ have I done to thee?”—1 KINGS xix. 20.

THE great prophet Elijah was now at last to be released from his long and hard service, his life of constant warfare and opposition. He was not to be for ever flying for his life, hiding in caves, winning mercies for an ungrateful king, hunted by an implacable idolatress; for now he was to anoint another to continue the struggle after him and to be a prophet in his room. I will use the words of a recent commentator:¹—

He finds Elisha “in the rich Jordan valley, living on the green meadow land where village festivals are held with dance and song;”² there the future prophet passes the year in those rural occupations which are natural to the son of a wealthy yeoman, superintending the field labourers himself, and, with the simplicity of primitive

¹ Professor Rawlinson in the “Speaker’s Commentary.”

² *Abel-meholah* means “the meadow of the dance.”

manners, taking a share in their toils. He is ploughing in a field with eleven other ploughs at work, each drawn by one yoke of oxen. Elijah crossed over to him and cast his mantle on him. The action of casting a mantle on another is not found elsewhere, but is explained as constituting a species of adoption, because a father naturally clothes his children. The Tishbite, having cast his mantle, strides on as if he had done nothing. Elisha, astonished for the first few moments, allows him to withdraw several paces, then starts up and shows his zeal by 'running' after him and overtaking him. Not unnaturally does Elisha ask to be allowed to seek his parents in the flesh, in order to bid them adieu before following his new spiritual father. 'Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee.' But the exigencies of a divine call supersede human duties. Elijah sees in his request a divided heart. Hence his cold reply—'Go, return, for what have I done to thee?' *i.e.*, go, return to thy ploughing. Why shouldst thou quit it? Why take leave of thy friends and come with me? What have I done to thee to require such a sacrifice? for as a sacrifice thou evidently regardest it. Truly I have done nothing to thee. Thou canst remain as thou art. But Elisha has meanwhile made up his mind to choose the better part. No longer pressing his request, he simply returns a few steps to his oxen and labourers, indicates his relinquishment of his home and calling by the slaughter of two oxen

and the burning of the instruments, feasts his people to show his gratitude for his call, and then leaving father and mother, cattle and land, good position and comfortable home, becomes the attendant on the wanderer."

It may be, as this writer says, that when Elijah said, "Go, return, for what have I done to thee?" he saw, in Elisha's request to be allowed to take leave of his father and mother, a divided heart, and would not give the permission or accept the service thus tendered; but to-day I will rather suppose the words to express the half *règret* with which a prophet draws in one who little foresees what a call involves. What have I done to thee? Alas! I have thrown on thee a spell which will shape thy destiny: no more pleasant family meetings, no more peaceful occupations; thou must bid farewell to quiet, thou must cross kings and beard the many-headed monster the populace. Why have I spoilt thy peace and ruined thy earthly happiness? It is the call of God, and I am bound to convey it; but my heart bleeds for thee. I have no home myself, but I can understand what it is to ask thee to break up thine. It is not yet too late to go back, if so thou pleasest; what have I done to thee?

Is it not with some such feelings that now-a-days we convey the call of God, and invite first one and then another to a life which they can little realise, but which we know will involve great sacrifices?

We encourage a young man to become a

clergyman, and with a kind of lingering half regret we may exclaim, What have I done to thee? You little know what you may have to encounter, what poverty, what hard work, what solitariness, what disappointment.

We induce a young man to be religious, and he little knows the life he is entering on, how his employers may dislike him and his companions fight shy of him. What have I done to thee?

We persuade a young woman to be more devout than the rest of her family, and it may occasion her taunts and coldness; it may separate her from her nearest and dearest. What have I done to thee?

The very infants whom we bring to baptism, the boys and girls whom we induce to attend a Sunday school, do they know the exacting, absorbing demands of the system with which we are connecting them? What have we done to them?

This is the subject which I would commend to your thoughts to-day, the double aspect of the Christian vocation. Religion has indeed its joys; godliness has the promise of the life that now is as well as of that which is to come. Still, it is well to remember that there is another side to this, for our Lord bids us count the cost. It was when great multitudes went with Him that He turned, as if He would reduce their numbers, as if they needed weeding. Just as in Gideon's time the large host had to be reduced to a faithful, steadfast, self-controlled few, so to the great multitudes the Christ turned and uttered

His sternest demands. "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple."¹ Thus He bids us sit down first and count the cost; He would have us consult whether we be able to meet the demand.

When one cried, "Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest," He replied by setting forth the homelessness of the Son of Man—"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." When the young ruler asked what he should do to inherit everlasting life, the Saviour tested him by demanding a complete sacrifice. And so, when His own mother, in her maiden happiness, stood before the aged Simeon in the temple, the double aspect of her lot was not concealed from her. Happiest and most blessed of all women as she was, a sword would have to pierce through her very soul.

Brethren, let us dwell on this thought to-day, when the Church's summons is about to sound in our ears. The Collect speaks of the wills of God's faithful people being stimulated, stirred up to action. We are about to take a solemn season in Advent to study the last great things; we are invited to make a new beginning, to start afresh with a contemplation of the subjects which most sober us, the mystery of our being, what we are,

¹ Luke xiv. 25-27.

whence we came, how related to God, for what purpose we exist here, and what is to be the issue of this short existence, what it will land us in, what it will transfer us to.

Christ, the great Prophet, the Master and Instituter of the schools of the prophets of the new dispensation, in various ways is summoning us. He finds us in our daily peaceful employments like Elisha ploughing, and invites us to new efforts, new duties. I wish to dwell on the arduousness of the future, if the call is obeyed. The path proposed will not be all smooth and pleasant. Not only is the gate strait, but the way is also narrow, and the companions on that way are few. What have I done to thee, my poor child, that I have passed to thee the cross of fire, and summoned thee to this war? See some of the results which will follow, if those who are summoned really respond to the call, and become faithful followers of the great Master.

They will be drawn on to take up the cross ; that is a mode of expression which we constantly use : let us think what we really mean by it. They will have to go against nature, denying their lusts, not gratifying their appetites to the full, gaining the mastery over themselves ; they will have to adopt some higher rule than merely to do the thing that pleases them. No more indulgence of indolence, no more speaking inconsiderately, letting the tongue run on as it will. No more retaliation and repaying a man that which he inflicts. No more enjoyment in contemplating

your own successes, as Haman recounted his honours, the rich fool his property, Nebuchadnezzar his greatness, Herod Agrippa his talents, and the Pharisee in the parable his observances; but instead of this vainglory, there must be a taking mentally the lowest place; you must feel that all your troubles are less than you deserve, and become conscious of more sin in yourself than you can know of in others. Is not this the life which we invite men to when we cast on them the mantle of Christ's discipleship, and may we not well exclaim, What have I done to thee?

How little did the mother of the apostles James and John know what she was asking for them when she sought for them high places in the Messiah's kingdom! To be high there involved what her weak heart might have shrunk from asking for her children, viz., drinking the cup of pain and being baptized with the blood of martyrdom. So now we ask concerning a friend, Lord, and what shall this man do? and we should like to hear that he would be popular, be honoured and useful, make an impression on his generation, and reap the reward of merit in the good esteem of his fellows. But the result of an earnest devoted life may be very different. Our friend may be unappreciated, misunderstood, harassed, thwarted; his failings may come into unhappy prominence, and the man of substantial merit be unsuccessful. He may have to be like Jeremiah rather than like Daniel, accused of falling away to the enemy, voted a bad citizen,

shut up, fed on bread of affliction and water of affliction, dying while involved in enterprises against which he protested. This was the life-long fate of one prophet, while the other was clothed in purple and honoured as a chief ruler.

Some have to represent the Saviour in His character as despised and rejected of men, while others are allowed a share in His triumph, go about doing good, and are surrounded with acclamations.

We know not what in this life we are introducing men to when we succeed in enlisting them in Christ's service; but there is another set of facts most sure, *i.e.*, that those who obey calls and follow Christ, however they may fare now, shall in the world to come receive everlasting life. There is a double aspect of the Christian's lot—a cross now, a crown hereafter; brief life here, everlasting bliss there. None will finally regret that they have stirred up the will of some erring brother or sister to throw off the yoke of sin, or aided some laggard to respond to the call, and when the voice asks, Whom shall I send? and, Who will go for us? to reply, Here am I, send me.

For what have I done to thee? Why, I have been the honoured instrument of turning thee from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God. I have saved thee from being a burden to thyself and a curse to others; I have given thee an object worth living for and dying for. I have introduced thee to the society of angels. I have caused thee to be a joy to the

Redeemer. I have been the humble means of helping thee forward in a never-ending progress, in an ascent to height after height—heights of knowledge, of goodness, of love and power, of proximity and kinship to God Himself.

Dear brethren, bethink you, has any Elijah ever crossed your path, any providential call found you in the midst of wonted employments, and seemed to introduce a new element into your life? have you felt that sacrifices were demanded of you, and has the human instrument through which the voice reached you, been inclined to draw back, startled at the risk to which he exposes you, and to say, Return, for what have I done to thee? Yet still, like Elisha, have respect unto the recompense of the reward; go forth as Abraham, not knowing whither you go, and in the end you shall not regret the venture of faith, for you shall hear Him saying unto thee, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

II.

THE PERFECT MAN.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.—ST. THOMAS' DAY.

“Thou spakest in vision to Thy Holy One, and saidst, I have laid help upon One that is mighty; I have exalted One chosen out of the people.”—PSALM lxxxix. 19.

WE know how rare is excellence of the very highest order, how difficult to satisfy the conceptions of the human mind, we can imagine things more beautiful than we ever meet with in actual life. Few faces in flesh and blood, or in pictures, few characters in fiction, few buildings, few pieces of music, few poems, altogether satisfy us.

Now, Almighty God, our Creator, intended that once in this globe's history there should appear on the earth a Perfect Man.

Before He came, there were raised up, from time to time, men who made approaches to excellence, but who, more or less, failed and disappointed expectations. He and He alone completely satisfied them.

Adam, *e.g.*, our first father, stood on the fair earth, amid the peace and beauties of the garden of Eden, in all the freshness of innocence.

He walked about with dignity, recognising his superiority to the brute beasts, assigning them appropriate names, exercising the sovereignty which God had entrusted to him. He was stately and majestic, erect and fearless, full of wonder and reverence, running over with cheerfulness and hope, knit to his bride with tenderest love, rejoicing in her help, and delighting in the intercourse with heavenly spirits which was afforded to him.

But Adam's day was clouded over, sin found admission into that paradise, man and wife were no longer in perfect concord, the animals rebelled against him when he rebelled against God, the angels turned a flaming sword against him, sin and death began to creep through his nature, his first-born proved a murderer; and so Adam's career was in some sort a failure, he could not be exhibited as the perfect man, satisfying the intentions of his Creator.

Many another since has been recognised by his countrymen as one out of the common way. A great conqueror has founded an empire, and round him have gathered legends, but seldom of any remarkable moral worth. The hero has been abler, stronger, more keen-sighted, more enduring, more successful, than common men; but there have generally been moral blemishes, to make us feel this was not the champion that man looked for, this was not the born king of men.

The further one got from God's own chosen people, the more unsatisfactory were the heroes

that men wondered after. But even in God's own Israel, faults and imperfections marred the characters most worthy of admiration.

A Moses appeared. He was learned in all the wisdom of the most civilised nation of his day; he was patriotic and made vast sacrifices to identify himself with the people whom he sought to raise; he adventured himself, and a dozen times dared the wrath of the fierce oppressor; he was meek and patient when his ungrateful people murmured; he was allowed to see something of the glory of God, and was sustained in communion with Him beyond the limits of man's ordinary powers; the law given through him is the boast to this day of his own nation, and the necessary groundwork of all that civilised nations hold dear. But Moses died, and his system all looked on to something to come; he had his infirmities and defects, and sometimes erred. He would have been the last to represent himself as the pattern that man looked for. Like John the Baptist afterwards, he would have shown that he had better entered into the spirit of his own law, preparing the way for Christ, and pointing men to Him.

The Jews had a hero as well as a lawgiver. Seldom has a man united in his character so many captivating features as David. He deserved to be, and he was, the darling of his people. In his early years there was in him everything that was engaging—pious modesty, daring in war, personal beauty, singular graciousness, and gene-

rosity that made him the idol of his followers. His was the poetry, religious and secular, that stirred men's hearts at that day, and the merit of which has been ratified by the concurrent testimony of mankind ever since. His adventures were most romantic, his conduct under persecution most forbearing. Affairs prospered in his hand, and, from a depressed condition, he raised the Israelites to be a power among the nations of the earth, made them felt among their neighbours, and gave them the command of the great lines of trade. Yet David—though felt among us to this day throughout the world, acting on us through those Psalms which echo in ten thousand churches, though so lovable a character—furnishes one of the saddest instances of man's instability. He sins greatly, he is punished severely, his latter years are overclouded. He may be the chiefest of Old Testament penitents, but he cannot be held up as a pattern man.

Solomon, again, left a name very dear to the Jews, who saw, in his renown and power, a realisation, for a short time, of the glory which they deemed ought to belong to their nation as the one faithful people. Solomon exhibited great range of knowledge and sympathy, his capacious mind collected from all quarters, and he had a breadth of intelligence which enabled him to do justice to the truths of each religion and philosophy. With a cosmopolitan embrace he was ready to appropriate what was valuable in every department of knowledge, not narrowly confining

himself to one class of subjects, but going forth to enjoy and take possession of all man's goodly inheritance. He appears on the scene, as one raised up at last to do the work which had been for so long allotted to his people. He builds the temple, he exhibits the prosperity of the nation whose God is the Lord, his rule is a peaceful and splendid one. Inquirers resort to him, he can solve their doubts and point the way to truth. He is glorious himself, and can make his people happy. And yet he breaks down, his wisdom is undermined, his breadth of view and liberality of sentiment pave the way for idolatry. Knowledge does not preserve him from sensuality, and, instead of entailing blessings on his children, he is the cause of miserable disunion, and saps the very structure which he had erected.

And yet, ill off as the world was for heroes, faulty and frail as its great men were, they served to keep alive the expectation that a great one was coming, that the state of the world would one day be more satisfactory. There lingered in most nations the traditions of a golden age, when men lived in a state of pastoral innocence, when man and beast were in harmony and concord, when there were no painful contrasts between rich and poor, when war was unknown; and the hope still lived on that it was possible that this golden age might return.

Some nations had a creed that introduced *Avatars*, or incarnations of gods, who, of course, appeared on this earth with superhuman power,

and the hope still survived that there might be a tenth and last Avatar which should remove the ills which man groans under. If the perfect man, the all-powerful king of men, should come, there was work enough for him to do. Were there not the various nations of the earth to be united, and, instead of mowing down each other by the thousands, burning cities, strewing ocean with wrecks, might not a universal empire be built up, not on conquest and rapine, but on a common interest in a competent sovereign, who should understand all, be just to all, and unite all?

Moses had given a law to one nation, should there never be a lawgiver to give a law to all nations? Did not many things testify to the unity of the human race, and why did they not adopt one moral code, combine in one system of worship, mould themselves after one pattern, and, instead of ever-varying standards, adjust their sentiments by one supreme law?

Again, deliverers had risen up in various lands, and rescued each his own country from its enemies; but should the day never come when one should deal with other enemies much more potent, much more formidable? Was not death an unnatural termination for men? Did not nature itself protest against it? Was man made to die? He went on storing his head, feeding his intellect, and was seventy or eighty years to be the term of his activity? Those affections which men vowed to each other should be eter-

nal, was death to terminate them? The promising, the loved, the engaging, cut down in their growth—were they gone for ever? Was it not conceivable that the hour and the man would arrive, or if not a man, some god pitying man, who should deliver man from his last enemy?

And were there no other enemies? Was there not an explanation of death, which introduced the ideas of sin, and sin's author, an evil one, the evil one? What if one could atone for sin? What if one could conquer Satan? What if one could abolish death?

We cannot wonder at the Hindoo notion that such a work could only be accomplished by the incarnation of a god. What was man, in his littleness, that it should be thought possible for him to work any deliverance?

But, brethren, we are little concerned with the dim surmises of the heathens; let us notice the intimations contained in those writings which we do believe in, the Hebrew Scriptures. There we find that, no sooner had man sinned, but it pleased God to drop comforting promises, in order to excite expectation, and keep alive hope. The woman had introduced sin into the world, but there should be a seed of the woman who should be in conflict with the serpent, the emblem of evil, and should bruise his head. The Father of the faithful should have a seed in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed. Henceforth the promise went on concentrating and narrowing itself, and defining more closely the

coming Deliverer. He should be Shiloh of the tribe of Judah. He should be a prophet like unto Moses. He should be a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. He should have only to ask, and the Lord would give Him the heathen for His inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for His possession. He should be God's Son, set on the hill of Zion; all princes should be called on to approach Him with the kiss of homage. He shall be born at Bethlehem, and yet His goings forth have been of old, from everlasting. Help is laid on One that is mighty, and yet He is chosen out of the people. He shall be born of a virgin, and yet His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Father of the age to come, the Prince of Peace. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him in awed reverence. All kings shall fall down before Him, all nations shall do Him service. And yet there are mingled with these glowing descriptions of power and universal empire, passages descriptive of the lowest humiliation. He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He is to make His grave with the wicked, and yet it seems that after death He is to come out triumphant, for He is to see of the travail of His soul and to be satisfied. His stripes are to be our healing. We are to make His soul an offering for sin, and by the knowledge of Him we are to be justified.

How wonderfully are these topics combined in

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the Hebrew Scriptures! How extraordinarily does the history of Jesus of Nazareth fulfil all these apparently conflicting predictions, and prove itself the right key by fitting the lock! To be man and yet without sin. To be man and yet God, to be rejected and yet triumphant, to suffer and yet reign, to be a Jew and yet accepted by Gentiles, to maintain the Jewish prerogatives and yet teach a world-wide religion—how beautiful the adjustment which combined all this! To appear when the world had been prepared, by the conquering Roman, for the transmission of intelligence, when the accomplished Greek had fashioned a language, adequate to express Christian mysteries, when the Jews were dispersed in various places with their synagogues, and Sabbaths, and Scriptures, to bear witness to the truths about to be proclaimed, how great God's wisdom and mercy to arrange things, so that His truth might have every advantage, and the fire from heaven find in every quarter materials ready laid which it might kindle into flame!

How great our privilege who have so many doubts removed, so many anxious questionings set at rest, by the Christian truths which we have been taught from childhood! Let us pray that, at this Christian season, God would strengthen our faith in His revelation, make us feel increasingly how it meets our wants, and guides us through our difficulties. It is noticeable that St. Thomas' day comes so close before Christmas, as

if to remind us of the necessity of faith. Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed. What will Christmas be to any who have not faith?—its family meetings, its music, its holidays, are but accidents and appendages, gathered round the great central fact that, in the fulness of time, God sent forth His Son, to take upon Him our nature, and in it to die and rise again. He comes—the perfect Man, the second Adam, but not to fall like the first—the second Adam, because He is the head of the race, who affects its fortunes and decides its future, because He is connected with every other man, and tells upon the life and death, the inner being and outward destiny, of every one born of woman.

He comes—the greater Lawgiver than Moses, for His law shall be adopted not by one nation only, but shall mould many. His law is not local, not full of regulations suited only to one phase of society. It is founded on a few great principles, on the attributes of God, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, in order to transfer some measure of those attributes to men, and to conform them to the perfect pattern of the God-man.

He comes—the Son of David, a faultless leader, awakening the enthusiasm of the human heart, generous to His followers, denying Himself to help them, ascending not an earthly hill, but the heavenly Jerusalem, and bidding the everlasting gates lift up their heads and receive the host which shares His triumph.

He comes—a greater than Solomon, with a true reign of peace, building the permanent temple, teaching the true wisdom, making His people solidly and permanently blessed.

Let us gather to Him, dear brethren, and prepare ourselves to welcome Him. Think what preparations are needed, the better to enable you to find grace in His sight. This is the object of Advent, that we may not come upon Christmas unprepared. Thus we find the Jews bidden prepare themselves before great occasions, such as the giving of the law and the passage of Jordan. This is why we have Lent before Easter, vigils before festivals, Advent before Christmas. Let each ask what he needs. It may be faith, it may be strength of will, it may be a forgiving temper towards some one who has injured you. Whatever you need, seek to Him, that He may prepare you for Christmas, and make you truly, safely happy at Christmas.

III.

THE INCARNATION.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

“And again, when He bringeth in the first begotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him.”—HEB. i. 6.

WE sometimes meditate on the greatness of the infinite Lord God. We look abroad by night on the starry heavens, we calculate the distance of the fixed stars, or rather we cannot calculate their distances, and we say His will instantaneously can be felt at the widest extremes of space. His omniscience surveys every atom in every orb. Place the creation of matter as far back as you will; prove, if you will, that the atoms which constitute the chalk hills were being formed hundreds of thousands of years ago—whenever it was, then He was ruling, ordering, controlling all, making all work out His will. This great God, who moves every leaf of every bough, who breathes in every gust of wind over wide continents, who counts every hair of every head, every grain in the sand by the seashore, the All-pervading, the Omnipresent, the Omnipotent—how could He become man? At the first mention of it faith is

staggered. Well might a heathen inquirer say to a Christian teacher—Is this really what you believe? After teaching me the vanity of idols, after showing me that there is only one Lord God, who made the earth and all that therein is, the sea and all that therein is, after expanding my conception of Him to the furthest possible extent, do you then turn to man in all his littleness, physical weakness, ignorance and vice, and do you wish me to believe that the great Spirit whom you have taught me to acknowledge, the God not of this earth only but of the whole universe, made His appearance here as a man? Yet, dear brethren, this is the Church's doctrine, not one jot or tittle of which can we afford to part with, not one assertion is there that we can allow to be watered down. He is very God, He who became man for us, not a being next to God, almost God, called God, but the co-eternal Son, begotten of His Father before all worlds, the very and eternal God. He possessed all the attributes of Godhead, He made the world, He reads the heart, He speaks and it is done, Nature owns Him, He walks the water, devils tremble before him, beasts acknowledge Him, sun and moon pay Him homage; and yet He becomes man, actual man, complete man, with a body and soul of ours. He has a body which grows by degrees from infancy to maturity; He feeds on milk, and bread, and men's other food; He sleeps as men sleep, He feels as men feel, He is sensible of pain, He will hunger, thirst, sweat, weep, bleed, die. He has a human soul, He re-

members with our memory, thinks as we think, feels as we feel, loves as we love; He can be stung by ingratitude, wounded in His affections, feel desertion, scorn, desolation—nay, He can be tempted. He will pray, He will draw support from God, His Father and man's Father; He will feel when that support which He has drawn from His Father is withdrawn.

Now, great as the mystery of the incarnation confessedly is, there are many considerations which may diminish the strangeness of it.

We can understand that it is godlike to be self-sacrificing. We all feel the intensest admiration for those who sacrifice themselves for the good of others, who forgo comforts, power, position, ease, life itself, to save from death, or to enlighten, or cheer, or educate others. And as God exceeds us in all other virtues, in love, truth, justice, wisdom, patience, long-suffering, pity, philanthropy, so it should not surprise us that He also exceeds us in self-sacrifice and voluntary humiliation.

Had the Son of God continued to be nothing but divine, He could not have made sacrifices for others, could not have exhibited sympathy in the true sense, could not have won our love and gratitude as now He has done.

Then, again, though much is dark to us and must always remain a mystery, we understand that this was the only way by which He could save. Sin had originated in Satan, it had found its way into our race; sin was of that virulence

and heinousness that it could not be passed over ; punishment had to be inflicted, it must be endured in the nature that had sinned. If one could atone for others, if one could expiate the sin of many, if the Son of God, our friend and advocate, our mediator and intercessor, could save us, it could only be by taking our nature and in it bearing our punishment.

And great as the sacrifice was, it was not derogatory to Godhead. The contingency had been foreseen, had been provided for, from the first. This was no after-thought. Man's nature had been created capable from the first in order that the Son of God might assume it. For this reason was man made in the image of God, after His likeness. We must not judge of man altogether from what he is at present, from what we see him to be. He is now in an infantile state ; one day he shall put away childish things. He now crawls as a worm ; he shall one day move as the awakened new-born butterfly. And even now we trace in ourselves the rudiments of greatness ; we are fearfully and wonderfully made in mind more than in body. It was no ordinary, no poor, feeble nature that the Son of God assumed when He became man. We may look on the acquirements and endowments of the noblest and greatest of the race as showing us what all are capable of. You and I may feel at present as pigmies beside men of the capacious intellect, say of Sir Isaac Newton, or the large-minded men who have grasped the multifarious affairs of nations and displayed won-

drous feats of brain power. But the point reached by any one of the race seems to me to mark what each may attain to, however hampered, ignorant, or undeveloped he may now be.

And so, in other matters, we may claim a kinship with all the morally great, the heroically good. When the Son of God took our nature, He took a nature capable of extraordinary self-sacrifice, of heroic endurance, of intense concentrated love, of exquisite delicacy and tenderness, of manifold versatility. Think what has been done by the most celebrated, most loved, most admired of our race; and however each has been to be honoured and cherished, they would have been certainly much more to be admired and loved but for the presence of sin in them, which impeded their powers, blunted their feelings, and caused the image of God to shine out from them too imperfectly. The most admired of our race were born in sin, and hampered and weakened by sin. The Christ was born without sin, was made like unto us in all points, sin only except, from which He was clearly void, both in the flesh and in the spirit.

Still, say what we will, exalt and magnify human nature as much as we can, the descent was infinite, for the Son to take to Himself a creature nature, to empty Himself, to put in abeyance as much as might be the exercise of His Godhead, and to become one of us, perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.

But was it not worth while? has He not had

the happiness, will He not have the happiness, of saving myriads? has He not been loved with the intensest devotion of which the human heart is capable? has He not seen men revive under His influence, conquer faults, regain moral health, exhibit graces, experience bliss, owing to His action on them? Does He not mould them, transform them, aid them, live in them? is He not the friend, the counsellor, the director, teacher, support that man needs and appreciates? And what He has already done, is it not small to what He will do? What He has received in the way of gratitude and love, is it not small to what He will receive? The effects He has seen, are they not small to what He will see? It is an eternity that these results will expand in.

And the effects on the human race are not all, not everything. All orders of reasonable beings, all ranks and degrees of angels, are affected by the incarnation, by the revelation of the character of God made in it, and the reconciliation effected by means of it. It has results beyond what we know or can conceive. He takes our nature, and is thereby the new head of the race, a second Adam, with power to affect every member of the human family, to develop from Himself a new progeny, to remodel human society on earth, and to people the courts of heaven with the redeemed from among men.

No sooner is He on the earth but tokens are seen of His influence, indications of what He is about to effect; the character of His rule shall be

seen from the first. Peace prevails, He has come to make peace, He is the Prince of Peace. The unity of creation is restored, angels are singing of God's complacency in man. It is a dispensation of blessings to the poor, and the shepherds, their representatives, are fetched in. There is honour for virginity and self-restraint, and Joseph and the Virgin-mother stand forth as the embodiments of these virtues. It is a religion for all mankind, not for the Jews only, and therefore Magi shall attend and claim their interest in the new-born King. Out of weakness shall His Church be made strong, and therefore He puts forth no visible power, but lies a passive, helpless infant on His mother's breast. His presence strikes dismay into the ungodly, therefore shall the tyrant be troubled at the news of His birth. His Church is always exposed, and always escapes as by miracle, therefore shall the tyrant almost seize Him, and yet be frustrated.

Dear brethren, when you have thus meditated on the general character of the events of Christmas, rest not till you have obtained a personal application of its blessings to yourselves in particular. Christmas comes to rouse us earnestly to plead that, in this season of grace, we, too, may obtain grace.

Rest not till you have attained the grace you need. He came to sanctify and glorify humanity: rest not till yours is sanctified. Rest not till progress is made in renewing your own nature.

Consider wherein you fall short of the standard, and apply at once to Him who is most ready to give. He loveth the children of men, else He would not have become one of us. He loveth you, even you, who have provoked Him and disappointed Him. Avail yourself of this opportunity. Ask Him for a Christmas gift. If man is kind, God is still kinder. If man is bountiful, believe that the tender compassion of God is perfectly inexhaustible. If you ask grace, holiness, goodness, virtue, you must receive, if you ask earnestly and perseveringly.

Dear brother, dear sister, what will you ask? What do you need? Is it strength of will, firmness to carry out your resolution? Is it power to cut off that right hand which is dangerous to you? Is it more sweetness of temper, more humility, more consideration of others? Whatever your need be, apply to Him who is sanctifying others, and would fain sanctify you. He would fain make you partaker of His graces here, of His glories hereafter.

IV.

TRANSFORMATIONS.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

“*Be ye transformed.*”—ROM. xii. 2.

THE Apostle Paul was at this time dictating a letter from Corinth to the Church at Rome. In that city there was a body of Christians whom he had never yet visited, though he was destined to end his days among them. It was already an important Church, and was to become vastly more important.

In the preceding chapters he had treated at great length of doctrine, he had gone deeply into most difficult topics, matters which have exercised the subtlest intellects in all ages;—he now passes, as was his wont, to practical matters, he will found short, strong, earnest directions on the great principles which he has laid down. He says to these Roman Christians—“*Be ye transformed.*” Is not this a word needed by our congregations at the present day? Transformations—be ye metamorphosed, altered from what you were by nature, from what you would be, if you

left things alone, if you took things easy, and drifted on, the victims of circumstances.

Dear brethren, let us each push this home to ourselves, let each one say, "Do I need a transformation?"

"Yes." Because you were born in sin, you inherit a corrupted nature, it is easier to do wrong than to do right. If we do as others do, if we do what we like, if we will be our own masters, we shall not only continue as faulty as we were born, but we shall positively degenerate, we shall become more selfish, cross, domineering, sceptical as we grow older—the more generous, sociable qualities of youth will disappear, we shall retire into ourselves, we shall less exert ourselves to please, we shall have less to work for. Life will tell upon us, and not for the better; men of the world, as they get older, lose what was attractive in them;—their self-indulgence is no recommendation of them to others, they have chosen to live for self, and they have their reward, they are isolated because selfish.

Be ye transformed, is the Apostle's remedy; with this he would fain arrest us on the downward path.

Let the man or woman who is living a useless life be transformed. At present they have no proper field for their energies, no regular employment for their day; they have to cast about to consider what they shall do with themselves. Shall they go here or there? Is there no new

sight to be seen, no excitement to take part in, no desire to be gratified?

What a transformation would it be, if the man made duty, not pleasure, the first thing; if he were on fire for a good cause, instead of being languid and listless, if he were actively employed in doing good to others or improving himself!

Again we say, Be transformed, to the man with feeble will. At present you are constantly making resolutions and not carrying them out; you admit that you ought to correct faults, but do not correct them; you begin a plan for a few days, and then drop it. What a transformation it would be if quiet energy were to take the place of this vacillation! How would the whole character gain in true manliness! Those who now find you disappointing, would be able to count on you; you would make progress intellectually as well as morally.

Again we say to him who is the slave of some bad habit, Be transformed. At present you are ashamed of yourself, you do not like to contemplate what you are doing, you try to hide it from yourself, you try to persuade yourself that it is not a habit, only some unconnected acts; but the angels, who watch your conduct, they see that you are getting faster and faster bound, you have less power to emancipate yourself than you had, and you will soon have less still. You will begin to justify what you do, you will say it is too late to alter.

Oh, what a transformation it would be if you

had power over your own will—power to snap these chains !

Now, there are accounts in biography and history of such changes as these taking place in men's characters. Something of this kind is affirmed by some of the great model king, Alfred. You may sometimes hear of a youth taking a turn, and, from being indolent, becoming truly industrious, under the influence of a new tutor, who gets power over the boy's mind. You may know persons of strong character, who, being convinced of the importance of a change, make it. Often improvements are brought about by responsibility being thrown on a person. A sovereign dies, and his idle son reforms, and proves, to every one's glad surprise, an excellent monarch. Sometimes an unpromising youth has been transformed into a good clergyman. Often a happy marriage works a transformation in a person ; or a man is put into an office of difficulty, or finds himself in a post of danger at a critical moment, and he rises to the emergency, and you say it has been the making of the man, not merely in the way of worldly success, but in moral worth and reliable character.

Let us examine ourselves whether we need to be transformed.

In some cases it will need a violent wrench at first ; the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. Strait is the gate, the entrance into a religious life. There is something to be given up—perhaps a right hand

to be cut off, or a right eye to be plucked out.

In other cases there is no such obvious violent effort to be made at once; but the man has to be awakened to the necessity of something being done, some steps taken, if he does not mean to be conformed to this world.

Notice that expression of the Apostle: "Be not conformed to this world." It shows us that we must take one side or the other, be moulded into one pattern or the other. Man is a prize for which a strife is waged; two armies are contending for him: Christ and good angels on one side, Satan and evil angels on the other side. If we are not transformed, we shall take our shape, receive impressions, from the things of the day, from the children of this world, from the things of time rather than from the things of eternity. The word in the Greek here is not *κόσμος*, *mundus*, but *αἶὼν*, *ævum*, this age. Be not solely under the influence of the things of the day. Do not allow yourself to suppose that this life is everything. The children of this world live for to-day, to make a fortune, to win renown, to succeed in life, to enjoy themselves in literature, to surround themselves with a happy home, a bright fireside, prosperous children, the esteem of their fellow-men. They go to their farm, their merchandise, their family: this bounds their view; they would be content if these things could always abide with them. This is being conformed to this age, this life, the present world,

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the state of affairs in which we find ourselves. But the Apostle would not have us satisfied with this. We were meant for something higher, something nobler. Both the opening sentences of to-day's epistle introduce a new idea different from this world, and that is God. Three times it occurs—the mercies of God, the sacrifice to God, the will of God.

St. Paul's hope of moving men is by appealing to a sense of the mercies of God, a belief in the great things done for them. He knows that love is the most powerful lever, that love begets love. He would not terrify us, not threaten us. He is speaking to Christians, to the baptized. If they only realised God's mercies, they would respond to His loving kindness.

Dear brethren, it is a season when we, too, should be full of the loving kindness of God; Christmas and Epiphany are the season of grace. Angels looking down from heaven after the birth at Bethlehem, doubtless cried to each other: The Son of God is on earth—what will He not accomplish! He has made the infinite descent. He has committed Himself to the undertaking. He has become man's next of kin, the goel, the avenger of blood, the redeemer of the inheritance, man's head and representative, the second Adam, the new man. Behold, He will work out His design. He will proceed leisurely; there is no haste, no impatience in Him. He will go through all the stages of man's existence. His silence shall be no less wonderful than His utterances.

He will lie hidden. He will be lost to view in Nazareth. He will wait His time. "The mercies of God," as exhibited in the incarnation, what a theme is this! The great God of eternity and infinity wishes us to understand how intensely He cares for us. The Son of God has taken our nature and still retains it. He wore it not as a mantle, to be put on for a time and then laid down. He is, and will always continue, man, the God-Man. He not only endured to walk this earth three-and-thirty years, and to suffer for us on the cross, but He makes the still greater sacrifice of continuing to care for us, continuing to interest Himself in us. We do not think enough of this; the high and holy One, the Saviour, notices each thought that passes through the mind of each one of us, and is affected by it, not only as the Maker who created us and the King who must judge us, but as the Head of our family, the Friend, the Physician, the Benefactor, the Relative, who will be distressed at our wrongdoing, grieved at our indifference, hurt by our coldness, disappointed by our failures, ashamed at our disgrace. This is as great a sacrifice as Calvary, this perpetually bearing the burden of His people, gravating them on His hands, presenting their supplications, watching their case, touched with the feeling of their infirmities. Hear the Scripture: "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest

which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

Believe, dear brother, that there is One scanning your thoughts, privy to every movement of your mind, intensely feeling every action of yours, keenly suffering if you do wrong, tenderly alive to every effort on your part to do right. To recognise this, to respond to this, is to know God, to know Him in His Son, as He has revealed Himself. Meditate on this, grasp this truth, pray God to teach it you, to reveal His Son to you. Start not aside as from an insupportable mystery: forget not the presence—you can forget it for a time; you can bury your head in business, in pleasure, in the things of this age, so as to lose sight of this truth, till it flashes on you with an awful suddenness at death; or you may meet "the mercies of God," accept them, rejoice in them.

If you can humbly, gratefully, receive this Gospel, these glad tidings, then your instinct will be to make a return, to give yourself to Him who has given Himself for you and to you. You will be ready to present your body a sacrifice: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." The Apostle would

have each Christian become a priest, and offer himself as a sacrifice. He mentions the body, because, as has been well said, "He would show the importance attached in the Gospel to the body, and would preclude the notion of a merely imaginative or sentimental religion, as distinguished from one of self-denying and vigorous obedience." Let us remember this; our religion will be worth very little, unless it takes effect on the body, on our food, habits, diet, expenditure, on our appetites and passions. Here are the materials out of which you may make daily offerings which will give the Lord Jesus pleasure, which will compensate Him for His sufferings.

This is the transformation that is required; offering sacrifices, burning incense, not to self, not on the altar of self or of some other idol, but making offerings to the Lord Jesus, which it will gratify Him to present to the Almighty Father.

This was the character of the life of the Lord Jesus on earth, and we are to resemble Him. The Christian is left to no vague notion of following the true or the beautiful, but he has a definite example in the life of the Lord Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. We are to be patient as He was patient, to forgive our enemies, to go about doing good, to resist temptation, to persevere in prayer, to bear opposition, to denounce abuses, to care for the poor, to hate sin, to love the sinner, to die resignedly, as He did. This is the transformation needed. "Be ye transformed." There is no doubt left as to the model.

Again, we are not left in doubt as to the power which is to produce the change. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. We are to be transformed by the renewing of the mind; the change must begin within, you must invoke spiritual influences, power from on high. It will not be denied you if you seek it. "Ask, and ye shall receive." Do not begin with seeking to correct outward habits, till you have implored inward grace. Believe that the Holy Spirit is willing to make His abode in your heart. For Christ's sake His delight is in the sons of men. Because the Son of God has become the Son of man, we are made children of God, and may be dwelt in by the transforming Spirit.

Dear brethren, if this moral work of transformation goes on in our minds and souls now, it shall be exhibited also in our bodies hereafter. "He shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body." The Saviour's transfiguration was a sample and pledge of what His people shall experience. The inward light shall shine from out of them too. Their countenances shall be transfigured. The Almighty Father shall own them too for sons.

We know not what reward, as well as duty, what glory as well as what effort, is involved in the command, "Be ye transformed."

V.

EVIL AND GOOD.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

“ Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil ; cleave to that which is good.”—ROM. xii. 9.

BEFORE examining these words in particular, let me remark that these very practical extracts from St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans come very appositely at this season of the Church year.

We have been studying the first advent of Christ, rejoicing in Christmas and Epiphany ; we have been thanking God for the incarnation of His Son ; and now the Apostle beseeches us, in consideration of the mercies of God to us, to present ourselves, body as well as soul, a living sacrifice to God. If you have been glad last Christmas, if you have enjoyed family meetings, the exchange of kindness, the sense of genial, hearty, friendly feeling all round you ; if you find on taking stock, on looking over the accounts of last year, that God has prospered you ; if while so many homes on all sides have been darkened by bereavement, yours is still a flourish-

ing household ; if you have enjoyed your children's presence in their holidays, reflect whether something is not due from you in the shape of a renewed dedication of yourself to His service. This self-devotion will be more real and thorough if God has granted you something better than earthly blessings ; if He has quickened your faith, and enabled you to make your own the precious truth that the Son of God has come very nigh you, has passed from being merely your Maker, the Lord God omnipotent, dwelling in illimitable space, to clothe Himself with your nature, become more intelligible to you, a being whom eye can see and ear can hear, One who feels for you with human sympathy, and desires to enter into the relation to you of intimate friend, teacher, brother, protector, helper, and guide. If you are growing to know Him as such, to cling to Him, to lean on Him, then you will feel that St. Paul puts the latter part of the Epistle to the Romans on a right basis, when he says—"I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

It is pleasant whenever we find that our modern Church services are in accordance with those of our forefathers in this island, and those of the rest of Western Christendom, and it seems that this custom of resorting to the Epistle to the Romans for the epistles of the Sundays at this season, prevailed of old in the English Church before the Reformation, and is continued now in

the modern Latin usage. The gospel and epistle used by us to-day were those appointed by the old Sarum use, and are still used abroad throughout the Western Church.

We know pretty well where and when this Epistle to the Romans was written. It was conveyed to Rome by the deaconess Phœbe, who is the earliest example in Church history of one like a sister of charity. She was a worker, an official in the church at one of the ports of Corinth, and to Corinth St. Paul makes other references in this letter. He was staying there three months after being in Macedonia, and was intending to go to Jerusalem.

He treats in this epistle of topics which he had already handled less fully in his Epistles to the Galatians and Corinthians, and after dealing with the position of Jew and Gentile before God, their common need of a Saviour, and the power of the new dispensation of the Spirit to make men holy, he introduces, in this latter and practical part of the epistle, a number of exhortations with almost Roman brevity, pointed, proverbial, suggestive, the seeds of Christian purity, integrity, patience, courtesy, and sympathy.

We do not know why this epistle was longer and fuller than his others; it may be that writing to a church planted in the centre and metropolis of the Gentile world, he took more especial pains to supply a whole treasury of moral teaching, though he knew not how influential that church would be, how rich in martyrs, how active in missions,

and did not foresee that we and such as we, eighteen hundred years after, all over the world should be teaching our children his words, reading them in schools and churches, and preaching on them.

Let me quote a brief paraphrase of my text. "Let your love be without hypocrisy; genuine, not affected; according to St. John's charge in his first epistle. My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but indeed and in truth; abhorring that which is evil; cleaving to that which is good. Do not trifle or tamper with anything wrong, do not go to the edge of temptation, not only refrain from sin, but abhor, hate, abominate it, because it is sin.

"On the other hand, do not sit loose to what is right; do not coldly and tamely practise it as a thing to which you are in heart indifferent, but cleave to it—'be glued to it,' is the original expression—grasp it as a thing from which nothing shall part or sever you."¹

St. Paul is about to go into details with regard to Christian feeling and conduct. Charity naturally occupies the first place in his thoughts. Before touching on any other grace, the word charity leaps from his lips, a broad, comprehensive, all-embracing love, but he thinks it necessary to guard it by appending the caution that we are to abhor that which is evil, he would not have us latitudinarian, indifferent to distinctions, he calls on us to discriminate, to

¹ Dean Vaughan.

distinguish between what is good and what is evil in the present mixed condition of things. God's love has two sides to it; on the one side He delights in holiness, He has exquisite pleasure in justice, truth, righteousness, He rests with delighted complacency upon every reflection of His own perfect goodness; but along with this, by the necessity of His being, the Lord our God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. Evil cannot bear itself where He is, it must wither in His presence. He hates, loathes, abhors, and cannot tolerate anything or any being which violates those laws of eternal righteousness on which the world is founded. "Our God is a consuming fire." When the name of God was proclaimed on Sinai, it was not only "the Lord merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth," but He "that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation." Sodom had to be destroyed, the Canaanites to be extirpated. The prophet's function was to denounce evil.

Nehemiah and Ezra were stern in separating the Jews from what was likely to denationalise them.

St. John bids, "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine," viz., that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, "receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed." And as this abhorrence of evil is essential to the

nature of God, so something of the same spirit has characterised His saints in all ages in proportion as they have been like Him.

David exclaims, "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee? Am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred. I count them mine enemies." We are not indeed to hate the individuals who sin, but we are to hate the sin, which mars and disfigures them. We are not to hate men and women, for they are yet, for all we know, recoverable, they may be extricated from sin; but Satan and his evil spirits we are to hate, for he is evil unmixed, unmitigated; evil is inextricably entangled with the essence of his being. Evil has become his good. His will is not merely perverted but inverted.

Dear brethren, this is a very practical subject. I believe where moral indignation against vice is slack and feeble, there love of virtue is tepid and faint. We are not to be lukewarm, weakly indulgent to all sorts of opinions and all kinds of practices. Rather, we are to seek to have the mind of God, to hate what He hates, to cherish what He approves. That man's, and that woman's, virtue will be very frail who does not scout what is evil with a flaming indignation. We should not deliberate about what is evil, not take it into consideration as an admissible proposition, but with promptitude stamp on what is wrong, knowing how much mischief may come from a spark, considering how inflammable is the material within us.

Let us apply these principles to the temptations of life.

We are to shrink and draw back from evil persons, dreading the effect which they may have on us, knowing how much we are influenced by the society we mix in, not persuading ourselves that we are strong enough not to be misled, that it is easy to mix with persons without agreeing with them ; but, if persons are immoral in conduct, profane in conversation, sceptical in opinion, mis-believers in questions involving orthodoxy, we are to retire from intimacy, to watch our intercourse narrowly, and confine it within prudent limits.

We are to do this, though the persons from whom we retire are rich, and their riches help them to be refined and elegant, and to surround themselves with those who are distinguished and highly thought of.

We are to shrink from those who would exercise an evil influence, though they are clever, intellectual, leading persons in society, much resorted to by those who value talent. We are to abhor what is evil, though it be connected with those who are witty and amusing. For the sake of a laugh and merriment we are not to grow familiar with, or seek the society of, those whom we cannot respect, and who, we feel, must be greatly altered before God can take pleasure in them. If we are to abhor what is evil, we must shun the society of, men who could bring us forward, help us on in the world, if we find them opposed to true religion.

And as we are to abhor what is evil in persons, so are we also in books. There are many books which a person with zeal for God's glory will keep clear of, books of a loose tone of moral principle, depicting scenes which should not be described, exciting passions which should be suppressed, going near to the borders of indelicacy, confusing men's notions as to virtue and vice. There are other books, which attract attention for bold speculations, and supercilious contempt for Church truths ; they try to prove miracles to be impossible, they resolve religion into myths, they disparage prayer, they shake faith in special providence. Why should people read these books ? Some may have to read them in order to answer them. Some may have other good reasons for going carefully into the subject, but surely the mass of persons need not run the risk of having their faith disturbed by meddling with subjects which they are not competent to grasp.

And it is not only evil in persons and books that we urge you to avoid, there are also blamable practices which you should abhor. In trade there may be tricks, adulterations, false measures, misstatements. In every profession there is a danger of abuses growing up which are not straightforward. Servants have a code among themselves which may mislead. Interpretations are winked at, which are not strictly correct. Men suppose things to be allowed, because they are generally done. We must not go by class judgments, must not follow a multitude to do evil,

but must bring a fresh mind to bear on points, and appeal to the law and the testimony, not putting darkness for light, and light for darkness, bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter, but calling things by their right names, and standing out sturdily in never so small a minority, if we judge there is an evil that ought to be abhorred. Remember that "abhor" is a strong word. We are not only, as I quoted before, to refrain from sin, but to abhor, hate, abominate it, because it is sin.

Take now the other side of St. Paul's injunction: while we abhor what is evil, we are to cleave to that which is good. We are to take its side, to stand up for it, to be its best friend, not to be ashamed of it. To repeat the exposition which I quoted before, we are not to sit loose to what is right, not coldly and tamely to practise it as a thing to which we are in heart indifferent, but to cleave to it, literally to be glued to it, as to a thing from which nothing shall part or sever us.

The good which we are thus to support and identify ourselves with, may be mixed up with something that is unpopular, dull, commonplace, nay, almost vulgar, but we are to give our adherence not indeed to that which is inferior in it, but to the good element which we are to discern and honour. Cleave with tenacity to that which is good. If there are good traditions in your family, good habits in which you have been brought up, good ways of conducting business to

which you have been used, cleave to these things. They will not only be good for yourself, but you will be able to transmit them as an heirloom to a succeeding generation.

Before I asked you to apply the principle of abhorring evil in various directions, and now I would say reflect how the other duty of cleaving to that which is good bears on your own circumstances.

You are to cleave to good persons, to value their acquaintance, to put up with their infirmities and peculiarities for the sake of what is good in them; you are not to make too much of class distinctions, but to overlook minor differences for the sake of interest in a common cause, the cause of Christ and His Gospel. You are to recognise Christian merit in different walks of life, and to appreciate it and learn from it in persons whose stations are very different from your own. Where you think you have found a godly man, one who is consistent and conscientious, a man of prayer, a man who is imbued with the spirit of his Bible; then, however humble his position, you are to venerate that man. Again, it may even be that the man who commands your respect differs from you in some matters, is of opposite politics, is mixed up with people whom you dislike; still, if he comes up to what the Apostle meant by good, you are to honour the man, and at least to desire the time when misunderstandings shall pass away, and good men shall recognise each other, and enjoy each other's society.

As to books, just as we are to abhor bad ones, so we are to cleave to good ones ; we are to approach them not in a critical spirit, but with respect, knowing that all good things come from God. A really good book is a friend, never in the way, never obtrusive, subject to no jars, or frets, or variations of temper, but always ready to be our companion, can be dropped without affront, and cut short without incivility.

I have spoken of the duty of moral indignation, indignation against what is immoral, but I would just remind you that we are all in danger of being severe against the faults of others, blind to our own ; severe upon faults to which we are not tempted, and too much inclined to apologise for those which beset our own temperament.

This age, *e.g.*, denounces cruelty and intolerance. The young are disgusted with avarice. The faults of persons professing religion are held up to scorn. There is much virtuous indignation on certain occasions, but let us learn not to spare ourselves, our own special propensities, to abhor what is evil in our own hearts, and to cleave to that which is good, rather to Him Who alone is good, that He may leaven us with His own holiness, and make us such that His Father can accept and pronounce "good."

VI.

SATAN BARRING THE WAY.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

“And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil.”—LUKE iv. 1, 2.

OUR Lord's sojourn at Nazareth was now come to an end, that remarkable period of thirty years of which so little is told us, but which He passed in the discharge of the ordinary duties of a Jew of that day. Obviously He desired to assimilate Himself to the great mass of mankind, to give the strongest possible assurance to the most numerous class in all ages and countries, that He has fellow-feelings with them and intimate knowledge by experience of their condition, to prove that there is nothing incompatible with the highest attainments of grace in the simple, lowly life of the peasant and mechanic.

For thirty years He has been tasting the hardships and labours of humble life, in an obscure and despised village, in an out-of-the-way part of the country, suffering from the presence of evil,

misery, and ignorance, from contact with sinners, but so little standing aloof, or separating Himself from common men, that, when a wave of religious feeling passed over the country, and multitudes, attracted by the report of the Baptist's preaching, flocked to the Jordan to be baptized of Him, the Lord Jesus also draws near, puts Himself in the position of a sinner, offers Himself for baptism, and overcomes John's reluctance to administer it to Him.

He needed no cleansing, but the fact of His going through the outward sign of it teaches that men should seek cleansing and forgiveness before undertaking new duties and entering on high offices. It was a pleasing recollection of this that caused the laws of chivalry in the Middle Ages to require that persons, before being admitted to the honours and duties of knights, should spend time in prayer, keep a vigil, and be purified with water, whence the origin of the English order of Knights of the Bath.

The Lord Jesus stoops to be baptized in all humility, and the moment of His humiliation is chosen by His Father in heaven as the occasion for His public introduction into His high office, as the great Prophet, King, and Priest that mankind needed. It is His coronation, inauguration, anointing. Not but that He was anointed before; He was Messiah, Christ, from the first. He was born Christ, anointed with the Holy Ghost, from the moment of the union of the Godhead with the first elements of His human nature. But now

He receives a fresh anointing, a new communication of gifts and graces. His manhood is hereby qualified for the work of the public ministry on which He now enters. The Spirit of the Lord is upon Him, for Jehovah hath anointed Him to preach the Gospel to the poor ; He hath sent Him to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

It was some knowledge of this that quickened Satan's hostility. The amount of knowledge possessed by the evil one is a mystery to us. People sometimes speak as if they thought him, like God, omniscient, but he was ever, even when good, limited in his nature, and sin has since in some degree blinded him, for all wickedness has a darkening, stupefying, dulling effect. Satan is not in God's secret, so that we cannot say how much the evil one knew of our Lord's nature and miraculous conception. But, doubtless, he knew enough to alarm him, enough to make him see that this was the Being to cope with, strangle, thwart, cross, resist, crush, nullify. Satan, after the first attempt to destroy the holy Child in His infancy, may have been comparatively inactive while Christ continued in obscurity at Nazareth ; but, now that He was coming out into prominence, now that He had been designated at His baptism and announced as the Son of God, the enemy of mankind sees that he must oppose Him.

Satan bars the way when the Messiah would fain

enter upon His ministry; this is the point to which I would direct your attention to-day, viz., Satan's opposition, when God's servants attempt anything good, and how that opposition is to be met.

Thus when Moses began to move Pharaoh to let Israel go, the Egyptian magicians were able to counteract him, and the Israelites themselves complained that he had caused their burthens to be heavier.

No sooner is David anointed, than he is persecuted. After the return from Babylon, Joshua or Jesus the high priest was co-operating with Zerubbabel in rebuilding the temple, but what does the prophet Zechariah see? "He showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him." When Nehemiah seeks the good of Jerusalem, he is harassed by the Samaritans. St. Paul no sooner preaches the Gospel after his conversion, then the Jews go about to kill him. And so now, if we would accomplish anything, we must expect Satan's opposition. Not only does this apply to important movements, affecting large bodies of men, but it is true of individuals, in the unobtrusive sphere of personal religion, in the private concerns of the spiritual life. If a man would lead a stricter life than those round him, Satan is ready to bar his way. It is urged that he need not make himself singular, that he can be just as really good without making any particular profession, that he had better be more sure of himself before

he avows his convictions, that he is acting under excitement and a passing impression. Holy Scripture tells us that the entrance on a religious life is peculiarly difficult, that not only is the way rugged, but the gate, the commencement, is narrow, requiring effort and sacrifice, so that a man has to reduce himself and divest himself of encumbrances in order to strain through.

Dear brethren, does Satan bar your way? Of course he will not show himself, or betray his connection with the difficulties which you experience. Say you are wishing to do good to others, and difficulties are opposed, your project is disapproved of by those who ought to encourage it, your first efforts are unfortunate, you seem to have done more harm than good. It may be a comfort to you to think that the miscarriage is not wholly owing to your own mismanagement, for that more than man is concerned, and no less an one than Satan is barring your way.

Or, it may be your life is a very ordinary one. You are not attempting anything conspicuous, any great achievement which you think should make you peculiarly a mark for Satan's assaults; you only want to lead an ordinary Christian life, to make the most of your opportunities, not to fritter away life, but to do your duty in your station. You are aware that this is not easy, considering the weakness of your own will, and the strength of temptation. I doubt not Satan is concerned in the difficulties you experience. It is he who bars the way.

Now, the history of our Lord's temptation is recorded on purpose that we may be instructed how to encounter and conquer the same enemy who assaulted Him, and will assault all who seek to follow Him.

Observe our Lord's victory came after His baptism, when He had been recognised as the Son of God; and, if we are to conquer, it must be in the strength of our sonship; *i.e.*, we must realise that we are God's children, that we shall grieve Him if we go wrong, if we quench His spirit. We must believe that He pursues us with unalterable affection, far transcending the love which any earthly mother bestows on her first-born. Think of the strength of those words, "a mother's love for her first-born son," and yet that is weak in comparison with the intense interest with which the true Parent yearns to arrest the moral ruin of those whom He has adopted into His family.

Then, again, Christ was led by the Spirit when He was tempted of the devil. This, too, is written for our instruction; we must not go forth in our own strength, but depending on the guidance and aid of God the Holy Ghost. Supposing you know that you are likely to be much tried; you are returning, we will say, to your office or house of business, where a dead set is made against you on account of your religion; or you are called to a post of authority, are about to take a prominent place, and therefore likely to be made the butt of Satan's attempts. Do not go

forth irrespective of God, without consulting, as it were, the oracle, but see that you may be fairly described as led by the Spirit, asking His guidance, following His leading, seeking His inspirations, casting out all things displeasing to Him, and praying Him to become your inward monitor and secret support. This is to be led by the Spirit, and the way to overcome as our Master overcame.

Next we must use our Lord's weapons. The history of His temptation is recorded, in order that we may apply every part of it to ourselves. It is not without significance that we find His victory was in the wilderness. This is to commend to us retirement, withdrawal from society, leisure to search out our own hearts, and to commune with God. Doubtless the scene of our Lord's temptation being laid in the wilderness had other bearings. It contrasted with the garden in which the first Adam found himself. It showed what sin had made of the earth. It represented man's present place in the world. It connected our Lord with His types and forerunners, Moses and Elijah. But also we believe that our Saviour's being led into the wilderness and abiding there forty days, was intended to do what it has in fact done, viz., commend to Christians the observance of seasons of retirement.

Such retirement is of two kinds—either positive withdrawal from society, such as in the last few years a few among us have availed ourselves of when we have gone into what is technically called a retreat, have gone from home for a few

days into a place where religion was to occupy our thoughts nearly all day long for two or three days, where we should have much prayer, exposition of Holy Scripture, meditation, self-examination, devotional reading, along with silence and abstinence from news and light reading and talking and letters.

Or it is possible without going from home for persons to provide something of this sort for themselves, especially in Holy Week. This is indeed the object of Lent. We are to decline invitations, to discourage gaiety, to gain as much time as we can in order (1) that God may show us ourselves, and (2) that He may show us Himself.

Next, if we would overcome, as our Master overcame, we must not overlook that He fasted, and that He has placed fasting among the religious practices which He expects to be observed by His followers, along with prayer and almsgiving, saying, in the Sermon on the Mount, "when ye fast," as well as "when ye pray," and "when ye give alms." We are beings wonderfully compounded of soul and body; with both we may sin, with both we may serve God. We must all be aware that heavy meals, indulgence in strong drink, make us little disposed for spiritual employments, and that on the contrary our minds are clearer, our faculties fresher, our feelings warmer, and hearts more disengaged when we rise early and betake ourselves earnestly to religious exercises.

Let us then give God of our best, and try to approach Him both in the morning and at other times with minds receptive of Divine influences, as little obscured by the fumes of the gross body as may be.

Once more, among the weapons which our Lord used, and which He has thereby commended to us, if we would overcome our Tempter, is recourse to Holy Scripture. All through the temptation, He comported Himself as man, did not put forth His power as God, but leaving the exercise of His Godhead in abeyance, presented Himself to be buffeted as man. He used man's weapons, did what other men might have done, and fell back on the Holy Scriptures, saying this is written, and that is written. How shall you, dear brethren, fall back on the Word of God, when you are tempted, if you lose faith in it? Pray that nothing may rob you of faith in it, that you may ever find in it comfort in sickness, companionship in solitude, direction in difficulties.

Thus I have reminded you, dear brethren, that if you are in earnest, and wish to live, not merely for pleasure but for duty, you must expect Satan to arouse himself to oppose you. As long as you are careless, content to do as others do, suppressing the voice of conscience, avoiding thought, content to sport the little day of life, like an insect, without thinking of a hereafter, Satan need take no particular trouble about you; but, if you have been at all wakened up from such

insensibility, if you have begun to ask seriously whence you came, what you have to do here, whither you are going, if you do not want to lay up materials for bitter remorse, and to throw away time now, only discovering when it is too late, what opportunities you have lost, then expect difficulties, particularly at the commencement of a more serious life.

The Saviour, in our nature, conquered on purpose to encourage us. Go over the ground I have this morning traversed with you. Use His methods, resort to His weapons, and you too shall be victors. You shall have the rewards held out in the book of Revelation to him that overcometh, and at last the devil shall leave you, and angels come and minister to you.

VII.

S O L O M O N.

ONE OF A LENTEN COURSE IN HEREFORD CATHEDRAL.

“And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind : for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts : if thou seek Him, He will be found of thee, but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever.”—1 CHRON. xxviii. 9.

It seems as if in designing the lot of Solomon, the Almighty had lavished on him every conceivable blessing. He did this no doubt chiefly for the sake of His people Israel, and His faithful servant David, the man after God's own heart. The land had now been free from idolatry well-nigh a hundred years, owing to the influence of Samuel, Saul, and David ; and as long as the nation thus served the one true God, He was pledged to let the consequences be seen in outward prosperity.

Empires soon rise and fall in the East, and by David's successes in war, God had placed something like an empire in the hands of his son.

Solomon had influence more or less complete from the borders of Egypt to the banks of the Euphrates. Races and kingdoms on his borders submitted themselves to him, paid him tribute, or propitiated him by presents. He seems to have had command of the caravan routes by which the valuable trade of India reached the west. The great maritime commercial cities of Tyre and Sidon found it to their interest to be on good terms with him. He was able to build Tadmor on an oasis in the desert between Palestine and the Euphrates. The Pharaoh of Egypt was glad to give him his daughter in marriage. All this proves the prosperous condition of the Israelites at the period, and we are told (1 Kings iv. 25) Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.

As to Solomon personally, the Almighty had most markedly chosen him for Himself. The Lord had sent, while he was yet an infant, and given him the name of Jedidiah, beloved of Jehovah. He had selected him, out of all the sons of David, to be the successor of that great prince. Solomon was to be the embodiment of the nation's blessedness, a representative man, showing what God desired to do for those who would serve Him. He was to have the honour and happiness of building that temple for which his father had so long made preparations. David had laboriously collected materials and treasures, but was deemed

too much mixed up with war and bloodshed to be allowed himself to build a house for God. His good desires were accepted, a site marked out, and a plan of the future building provided him ; but Solomon was to have the happiness of finally arranging for the erection of the building. He negotiated with the king of Tyre, procured the cedars, the architect and artificers, raised the levies of workpeople, whose exertions overcame the difficulties of the site, dragged the materials up the rocky heights of Jerusalem, tunnelled the mountain, excavated the foundations, hewed at a distance the vast stones, built the platform, and placed on it the building which, though not large, was costly, and enshrined within its walls all that was sacred and dear to Israel, the tokens of God's presence. Nay, more, the Most High deigned to fill the Holy of Holies, the shrine itself, with the cloud, which had not been seen since it marshalled the way of the Israelites in the desert. Now at last it lit up the dark recess, the oracle, with flashing glory, and made the place insupportable by the priests, who retired from the excess of light.

Never, perhaps, did a human being occupy a more glorious position than Solomon on that day when, the temple having been completed, he dedicated it in the sight of the assembled people, and there fell from heaven the fire which marked the acceptance of the offering. He had the delighted support of his people, the approval of his own conscience, the express testimony of God.

That was at last accomplished which had been long striven after, long prepared for.

What shall we say of the intense pleasure which Solomon must have derived from the exercise of those brilliant and versatile abilities with which God had endowed him? "God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the seashore. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt, for he was wiser than all men." Every field of knowledge then open was explored by him. He was great in his acquaintance with God's works in nature. "He spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes." He was keen-sighted in his administration of justice, competent to all his duties as king, able to judge the knotty questions which in those days were referred not to expert lawyers, but to sovereigns personally. Doubtless he enjoyed the society of the learned and able men whom he gathered round him. He appears to have organised the arrangements for his court and household very completely. The peace which marked his day was, humanly speaking, owing no doubt to his politic management. He caused himself to be respected by means of the large army which he maintained, though himself a man of peace. He pushed commerce, and with it, no doubt, research

into distant climes, and seems himself to have travelled. He built magnificently for his royal residence, after having first discharged the duty of building for God's glory. He surrounded himself with exquisite gardens, and in fact realised the ideal of a magnificent monarch, all whose appointments betokened wisdom and good taste.

Then, too, he had the satisfaction of being appreciated; his name spread throughout the East. The queen from distant Sheba was probably only a sample of the inquirers after truth, who sought to one who was the head of a nation with so unique a creed, and at the same time so visibly blessed by the Most High. "And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom." We may think that Solomon had other joys than these: he had the joys of the poet, the author, the artist. "He spake three thousand proverbs, and his songs were a thousand and five."

He had not only the satisfaction of causing his father's psalms to be rendered with increased effect in the courts of that temple which he had built, accompanied by the musical instruments which he had improved, but he added to David's psalms compositions of his own.

He had the joys not only of an earthly author, he had the mysterious privilege of being also an inspired writer, the mouthpiece of God the Holy Ghost.

It is possible that, in his early youth, he had

a joy of another sort, earthly indeed, but pure and honourable, viz., a passionate attachment for a maiden worthy of his love.

What a complete picture of earthly happiness is here presented! What is wanting to this assemblage of power, peace, wisdom, popularity, influence, genius, love, poetic power, and piety? One can only account for such a marvellous combination, by considering that it was God's special intention to show, by this example, two things—(1) what He would fain do for the Jews, how glorious and happy the nation might be, if it only would cleave to Jehovah; (2) that God designed to give us a type and foreshadowing of a triumphant, as well as of a suffering, Messiah. He would set up an image of Christ's work in building a spiritual temple, attracting the heathen, espousing the Gentile Church, betrothing to Himself the Church as a pure virgin, reigning in peace, administering His kingdom with perfect wisdom, and making His subjects blessed and glorious. What Solomon did in a degree, our Lord does perfectly; what Solomon did in a material, earthly manner, Christ does spiritually in a heavenly manner.

And now the type, the shadow, having answered its purpose, God's special grace is withdrawn; and another lesson is taught us, viz., the imperfection of all things human, the possibility of throwing away the greatest advantages and ruining the brightest prospects.

Solomon imitates Oriental despots by taking

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to himself many wives and concubines; these induce him to sanction idolatry; he is punished, and the nation suffers with him. A sad story, yielding many warnings. He ought to have remembered the warning in Deut. xvii. 17, "Neither shall he" (*i.e.*, the king) "multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away." He ought to have imbibed the teaching of Genesis, and learned that the one woman was made for the one man. Ambition, vainglory, rivalry of others, had probably as much to do with his sin as sensuality. Kings in those days, as indeed since, thought to strengthen their alliances by marriages.

But whatever his motive at first, his character gradually declined and deteriorated in the unhealthy atmosphere with which he had surrounded himself. I have seen his false steps very probably traced out, somewhat in this way:—Idolatry had been so long proscribed in Israel—for almost one hundred and fifty years—that he may have conceived its revival in such enlightened days out of the question. He would, therefore, be off his guard. These poor foreign wives, some of them princesses, all of them young and childish, would pine after the superstitions associated with their distant homes and early recollections. He was tempted to humour their weakness, and let them gratify themselves with rites which he despised, but they cherished. Foreign worship, having once begun, would interest his inquiring mind from its novelty. He

would investigate the principles at the bottom of it, and catch at some view superior to that of the vulgar. He would begin to think that there was a substratum of good in all; that Jehovah, Jove, and Lord were different names for the First Great Cause. Perhaps when he permitted the exercise of foreign rites, he purified them, and flattered himself that he was doing some good, by stripping them of their most offensive adjuncts. Then, while he was becoming gradually familiarised with these foreign ceremonies, and losing the dread and horror with which he had at first contemplated them, an opposite process was perhaps going on in his mind with regard to the pure worship of the true God in His holy temple. He might gradually come to think *that* grave, severe, tedious, uninteresting. Thus, little by little, did he fall away, undo the work of his single-minded father, and bring down a heavy punishment on himself and his people.

Probably this was not his only sin. One sin always leads to another. He came to be regarded by his people as oppressive, probably with reason. His expenditure on his own buildings may have been selfish and excessive, the outlay on his harem monstrously profuse. Adversaries were raised up to him. Edom began to rebel. Jeroboam, a man of much ability, was promised by a prophet the succession to ten tribes out of twelve. Division was introduced into the kingdom. Along with division came in the worship of the golden calves. These

paved the way for Baal worship, and the history of Israel for generation after generation is a melancholy one, to be traced in great measure to this sad break-down of character, the defection of him who was once so wise, the favourite of Heaven, the chosen son of David, the builder of the temple, the inspired writer. "Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall."

I think there is a warning here specially applicable to our country in the present day. It is a time, on the whole, of prosperity with us. It is long since we have been visited with war in our own island. Buildings grow, cities increase, trade develops, comforts are multiplied, education makes progress.

Foreign potentates resort to England, much as the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon. Heathen rulers come here, acknowledging our greatness, and desiring to learn the secret of it. Some of our clever scholars, too, seem in danger of magnifying heathen religions, exaggerating, *e.g.*, the merits of Buddhism. Our people are in danger of passing the bounds of a reasonable toleration, and lapsing into a state of easy-going indifferentism, which professes to be philosophical. We may dwell on the good points of false religions to an extent which shall make us insensible to their obscuring the character of God, and sanctioning in their votaries some kinds of immorality. Laxity about dogma is connected with a disparagement of external religion, of forms, observances, practices, which are parts of the Church system. Now,

when men break away from these cords, and consider them as narrow restrictions, which a more enlightened age has outgrown, there is a danger of the young at least lapsing into a freedom in other particulars; free thought often leads to free living.

You see the application to our times. Were we as prosperous as the Israelites under Solomon, we must not think that our national greatness rests on a secure footing, unless it is based on cleaving to God and to that revelation which He has made to us—a revelation different in some measure from that which He made to the Israelites, but to be guarded as jealously as they were expected to guard that which was made to them.

Were we as wise as Solomon, we must not trust to our wisdom to preserve us from sinning ourselves, and involving others in our punishment. Satan himself was once good, probably the wisest, brightest, most powerful of spirits. We must not make too much of talent, in ourselves or others. We must continually realise our dependence on God, and never think that aught we have of power, knowledge, goodness, is our own. The very possession of great gifts, like Solomon's, constitutes a temptation.

Still, as of old, the frequent punishment for neglecting God's revelation and the deposit of faith committed to us, is division, and through loss of unity, loss of power.

This is the spectacle which Christendom now presents. It is divided, and because divided,

inoperative on the heathen, unsuccessful in propagating the Gospel.

“In the day of prosperity, fear.” When men are inclined to boast of material prosperity, diffusion of knowledge, advance of science, let us not feel too secure. Let us not like Nebuchadnezzar look proudly around and say, “Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” His fall was sudden, and we in our day have seen sudden disasters. How short was the interval in the capital of the neighbouring country between the exhibition to which all the world crowded in 1867, and the siege by enemies and conflagration by their own people in 1871! England seems to man’s eye very secure, but if we provoke God, there are a hundred ways by which He might punish us also.

But, besides the warning to us nationally, let us make a more personal and individual application of the subject.

We are most of us in our outward circumstances very unlike Solomon when David in his old age raised himself from his couch to address the young prince, perhaps twenty years old, in the presence of all the notabilities and representatives of classes in his kingdom, but still the text has a message to all here present. It is a word which a dying parent might well address to his child. It is a passage which I have known a pious father select and give as a motto to his children, when he thought himself taken for death.

“Thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind : for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts : if thou seek Him, He will be found of thee ; but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever.”

We all have a work to do for God, for which preparations have been made, and for which others have been passed by, and we specially designated.

First, find out what your work is. Perhaps it is to conduct a business unblamably, or to train up a family piously, to work some institution, to teach some scholars; or simply to live soberly, righteously, godlily. Next, preparations have been made to enable you to do that work ; the cast of circumstances has been so adjusted as to give you all that is necessary in the way of help and material, and lines on which to work ; it is no novel work to which you are called, you can get advice. Once more it devolves on you to do it, it is expected of you, others have been providentially excluded, and you are the very person on whom the performance rests.

Hear then the message. Thou, Solomon, my son, know God. He is the God of thy fathers ; they served Him, and He never failed them. Know Him, He may be known. “Knowing” in Holy Scripture is equivalent to “loving.” Improve thy acquaintance with Him. Serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind, not grudgingly, not in fear, not doing as little as possible,

but with a cheerful, generous mind, regarding not merely the letter of the commandment, but the spirit of it, for God demands not merely a formal outside obedience, but the love, the allegiance, the confidence of the heart. If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to thee; but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever. Take heed now, for the Lord hath chosen thee for a special work, be strong and do it.

Solomon erected the material building, but failed in raising the spiritual edifice. Let us not be content with any works outwardly good, but never rest till we have made progress in providing a habitation for God in our souls and bodies. Solomon was injured, if not finally ruined, by sensuality, vainglory, latitudinarianism, and idolatry. He abused great gifts, and forfeited a glorious vocation. The cleverer, the more intellectual, the more admired, the more successful a man is, the more is he in danger of a similar downfall. How often has the bright promise of youth been clouded over, and natural talent, great culture, religious privileges in their highest form and beauty, proved unavailing to secure perseverance! Surely this is a very Lenten subject. It should send each of us to reflect on our own career, how far we have fulfilled the expectations once formed of us. God grant us to discover, before it be too late, how far we have failed, and why we have failed. If these words of David his father came back on Solomon's

memory in his premature old age, when he had found out that all was vanity, he had not such helps to repentance and amendment as have been graciously vouchsafed to us. It is well that older persons may, by God's grace, recover themselves. What a blessing would it be, if, through these services, some one might even now be induced not to despair, not to procrastinate, but to apply at once to Him who is greater than Solomon! If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee. "Seek Him while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near."

But still better would it be if we could this night arrest the ear of some younger person, and say, Let Solomon's experience suffice, do not tread the same path, abuse not thy gifts, forfeit not thy vocation, know thou the God of thy fathers, He desires to make Himself known to thee. Thou hast a work to do for Him, a temple to provide Him in thy heart. Others have prepared, by the education they have given thee, the examples they have set thee, the writings they have put in thy hands. Thou hast been designated, called, selected. None but thou can do that particular work which is allotted thee. Be strong and do it; strong against sensuality, against vainglory, against latitudinarian indifference, against idolatry of self, strong in Christ's strength, be strong and do it.

VIII.

THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA.

' LENT.

"Jesus saith unto her, Give Me to drink."—JOHN iv. 7.

THERE are several cases narrated at some length in St. John's Gospel of our Lord's dealings with individuals. There is the conversation with Nicodemus in chapter iii.; the woman taken in adultery, chapter viii.; the man born blind, chapter ix.; and this woman of Samaria, chapter iv. All of them illustrate our Lord's graciousness, tenderness, condescension, and readiness to take pains to enlighten and save if it were only one soul.

Consider the contrast exhibited in this chapter. On the one hand, a woman of, I suppose, humble life, belonging to a mongrel race professing an inconsistent and incongruous religion, a sort of heretic and schismatic; a woman of a discreditable, if not profligate career, for she had had five husbands, probably having been divorced by some of them, or herself divorcing them, and at this very time was living in adultery with

another man ; a woman ignorant and difficult to raise to any appreciation of spiritual things, for she misunderstood what was said to her, and seemed chiefly occupied with her bodily wants, and careful how to escape the trouble of her daily toil.

This was what she was on the one hand, and on the other was He, the co-eternal Son of the Almighty Father, in His pure manhood, unsullied by the breath of sin—He, her Maker, who knew what she might have been, how good, true, useful; and what she had become, restless, blemished, injurious to others, on the road to worse faults and direr ruin.

Observe His dealings with her; He contrives by His providence that she should come to draw water, contrary to the usual practice, alone, not with other women. Was it that she was shunned by others, or, conscious of her damaged reputation, avoided them? He, too, it was provided, was alone. His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. He was wearied with His journey, for He travelled on foot, but He overcame lassitude, and exerted Himself to win her. He waits not for any application from her, for He came to seek, as well as to save, the lost. He does her the infinite honour to ask of her water to relieve His thirst and recruit His powers. He gradually reveals to her who He is, the gift of God, that He possesses a mysterious Being, that He has power to give the water of life, something not external to a man, but inward, therefore independent of circumstances, not to be taken away

by man, entirely satisfying, restful to, and contenting the spirit, ever fresh, ever fertilising, ever gladdening and issuing in everlasting life.

He finds her dark, ignorant, unable to rise to the conception of the truth which He longed to impart, which, if received, would refresh her soul wonderfully more than cool water would refresh His heated, wearied frame. He saw her state, it all lay bare before Him, and He saw the sin which caused all this dense ignorance. She must be couched for this blindness. Painful as the process will be, He must put His finger on the sore point. He must bring her sin to her mind: "Go, call thy husband, and come hither." He welcomes the first word of truth, the first token of a genuine confession: "I have no husband." He shows her that He knows her whole history, that no action of hers has escaped Him.

She starts, and her manner changes. She treats Him with more respect, calls Him Sir or Lord, and states to Him her difficulties about the theological questions of the day, as controverted between her people and the Jews. And He repels her not.

He does not say that such subjects are not for her, and that she must first do the right thing morally before she is fit to approach such topics, but He clearly answers her as to the comparative merits of the Samaritan and Jewish creeds. He reveals to her the change that is about to come on the earth in the removal of the whole Jewish system. He enunciates to her some of the most

sublime doctrines of religion, and at last declares in the plainest terms to her what we scarcely ever find Him uttering in as plain terms to any one else, that He is the Messiah, the Christ: "I that speak unto thee am He." From many considerations we may infer that His gracious words were not lost on her. He would not have contrived this scheme for arresting her attention and dealing with her, had not He meant to make her a monument of His grace. Probably it was because He knew of a thirst in her soul for better things that He presented His grace under the image of water of life. He knew that, as the prodigal had tried to satisfy his hunger with husks, so she had tried to satisfy her desire to love and be loved by earthly objects which, one after the other, had proved disappointing, and that there were aspirations within her which God alone could satisfy.

We judge that, like a thirsty plant, she drank in each gracious truth which He successively dropped upon her. She left her waterpot, like one whose previous interests had vanished in the transport of finding Christ; she proclaimed the new-found Lord of her spirit to others. Above all, when the disciples returned from procuring food, they found their Master refreshed, and what was it had refreshed Him but the pleasure He had derived from enlightening this dark soul, giving power to this weak captive to snap her chains, and arresting the moral ruin of one made for happiness, but till then wretched?

Now, dear brethren, this history would not have been recorded in Holy Scripture, but that there are lessons here, not only for open sinners like this guilty woman, but for many a one whom man respects. Many have need to be led through some such a process as was blessed to her. Christ would meet them alone. Take care to be sometimes alone with Him. Enter into thy closet, shut the door. Avail thyself of any opportunity of being alone. Do not avoid solitude. Do not always fly to a book to escape solitude and thought. Hear Him saying to thee, Give Me to drink, give Me refreshment, grant Me to rejoice over thee, refresh Me, recompense Me for My sacrifice. He is sitting now, not weak and worn by an earthly fountain, but in the plenitude of power, in the glories of heaven, by the well of immortality, and yet He craves refreshment at our hands, He asks for that which none but we can give.

Dear brother, dear sister, believe that He desires thee to give Him to drink. Is it not a noble thing to aspire to, this giving pleasure to Christ on high? Is it possible to present religion in a nobler form to any human being, than to tell him that the God-Man on high, instead of threatening, humbles Himself to ask this favour of him, Give Me to drink.

Once listen to Him, suffer thyself to be drawn on by Him, and He will tell thee what He has in view for thee, what He designs for thee. Thou

mayest experience that of which at present thou hast scarcely a conception. Thou shalt be satisfied from within, not from without. Thou shalt have a happiness independent of health, riches, society, literature. Thou shalt have a central joy opened within thee, like the central fountain in the interior of an Oriental house built round a garden, *i.e.*, the Spirit of God shall renew thy spirit, and cause it to flow forth in love to God and man, ever fresh, ever fertilising, with nothing wearying or decaying about it, but with the blessed pledge and foretaste of everlasting life.

But these glad tidings are continually being sounded in men's ears, and something interferes to prevent their being welcomed and finding admission to the heart. What is it? it is sin. There is something must be probed, something that the Saviour must put His finger on. Thy sin must be brought to thy mind, the arrow must find thee out. With one it is an indulged habit of sloth; with another over-anxiety to grow rich; or you are uncharitable towards some one, and cannot make up your mind to beg his pardon, and make it up; or you have appropriated money in a dishonest way, and restitution is due from you, and the promises of the Gospel will make no impression, find no admission into your heart till you have set this right; or some secret indulgence is unmanning mind and body; or you are indulging in stimulants to an injurious extent; or you are entangled in a vicious connection which you have not strength to break off. Be-

lieve that you have to do with One who, as this woman found, can tell you all things that ever you did. He knows of how long standing the fault is, what evil influence affected your childhood, what bad friends misled you in youth, how often you have tried to get free and have failed, how nearly you have been on the point of making an ingenuous confession, and could not bring it out.

Perhaps the contemplation of the great truths which He set before this erring woman may help you. To be accepted as a true worshipper, to worship God as a Spirit and yet a Father, to worship in spirit: this were a great thing, this is worth striving for, for this it is worth while to fling away the waterpot, to give up the repeated disappointing attempt to go on living for this world, living in sin, sin unforsaken, unrepented of, unconfessed. "The Father seeketh such to worship Him." He too thirsts for the homage, the confidence, the love of the human heart. Oh, how wonderful is the infinite loving kindness of the Almighty, that having all things in Himself, He should yet go out of Himself, and solicit the affections of His wandering children, of such as this poor sinner of Samaria, of such as we, who, without her excuse, have disappointed the Divine intentions!

God grant that in this Lenten season, the Saviour may be recreated by having meat to eat that the world knows not of, that He may see one convert brought by another, one passing on to

another the experience, "He told me all things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ?"

God grant that He may see fields not only white to harvest, but actually yielding Him fruit unto life eternal.

IX.

FORGETFULNESS OF GOD.

LENT.

“ Now consider this, ye that forget God.”—PSALM l. 22.

IN Lent we should reflect on the temptations which most easily beset us, and I think there is no fault more dangerous than that to which I call your attention to-day, viz., Forgetfulness of God.

There is, I should think, no sin more general. It is the sin of many who are living decent, respectable lives, men working hard at their business, mothers absorbed in the duties of their families, children making progress in their studies, scholars and scientific men pursuing their researches; it is the fault of many among these, as well as of the sensual and profligate and avowed unbelievers. It is comparatively easy to forget God, especially in the case of those who have grown up in ungodly homes. But even when men do not start with this disadvantage, they find themselves in a world with which God does not visibly interfere. Man and

man's actions seem sufficient to account for most events ; and, as to those things which are beyond man's control, such as the motions of the heavenly bodies, weather, wind, the seasons, the tides, life, death, we get used to them, we get to consider them as matters of ordinary occurrence. It is the commonest thing in the world to have much to do with such matters, and yet to forget God in them.

It is one main part of our state of probation here to recover the knowledge of God. We were created to know Him. Adam and Eve, before they fell, held intercourse with God ; but sin has obscured the eye of the soul, the inward power by which we should know God, and if men are left alone, not enlightened by the Gospel, not renewed, they remain estranged from God, ignorant and forgetful of Him. But it is especially sad when this is the case with those who have been made Christians, have been baptized, have had a communication made to them from the Son of God, the central light of the universe ; very sad when such relapse, return to darkness, and forget God.

This forgetfulness exists in various degrees, but it tends to grow and increase upon a man. Children are more disposed to remember God than their elders. It is easy to lead children to connect God with the blue sky ; to tell them of the fruits and flowers which He has made ; they have minds with all the essential qualities of adult minds, are susceptible of wonder, rever-

ence, fear; but, unless children are carefully tended, impressions wear off, good habits are dropped, fresh interests arise, they go into the world and do as others do, they are sensitively alive to the opinion of those round them, new appetites and passions develop themselves, and in a few years the religion of their childhood is a strange thing to them, too much like a nursery toy or a garment which they have outgrown, interesting indeed as a record of the past, but no longer part of their living selves.

With many in the busy world this forgetfulness of God goes on increasing. Shopkeepers say that it is an age of competition; their hours of employment are long, they are absorbed in the struggle to get a living. The labouring man takes his cue from his fellows, and is in bondage to the opinion of his class. And so we come to what is often called practical atheism, a forgetfulness of God which has not indeed yet adopted any theory, but makes men act much as they would act if they did not believe in Him. With some, things become even worse; some men will have a theory, they reflect and question, and at last they are victims of a specious philosophy, which seems to make God unnecessary in His own world. Laws are supposed to execute themselves, and everything can be accounted for, and no necessity is left for a Creator or Governor of the universe. At any rate, they say, His existence cannot be proved. They think it may be left a moot point, they will go on without taking

account of Him: "God is not in all their thoughts." They forget God.

Such men may be apparently upright and benevolent, but I have little doubt that, when their system has had time to bear fruit, the result will be a loosening of moral obligations, and that the old Scriptural connection of cause and effect will come true. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God;" and it follows, "they are corrupt, and become abominable in their doings."

Think of this, all ye who are at present only forgetful of God, only so much occupied in the business and pleasures of life as to be little in the thought of Him. Beware lest you go on from bad to worse. The mind seeks to be consistent, it desires a theory to justify itself to itself. Any allowed sin makes a man shrink from the thought of God, desire to forget Him; and what we do not wish to remember, we very easily forget. Our opinions are much influenced by our wishes. We suppose a thing to be as we wish it to be. This forgetfulness of God was very much the error of the Epicureans of old, of whom we read in Acts xvii., whom some one calls the heathen of the heathen. These philosophers, without absolutely denying the existence of Supernatural Power, conceived of it as not concerning itself with human actions. And is not this something like what many think now? They forget God, and almost come to imagine that God forgets them. Yet, if the general tendency of heathenism is to deny God, in all

ages there have been some among the heathen who should put us to shame by their earnest seeking after Him. What would they not have become, if they had had our light, seeing how they felt about in the darkness after Him! There have been, in the East especially, meditative men, who have devoted themselves to the contemplation of God, sincere seekers after Him, who were content with poverty and obscurity, if haply they might surrender themselves to a life-long meditation on the Great Being, who, they felt, was alone worthy of their homage.

Among ourselves, it should be remarked, that this forgetfulness of God is quite compatible with an observance of the outward forms of religion. A man may conduct family prayers in his household very much as a form, which once perhaps had life to him, but has now lost its meaning. He comes to church, but his thoughts wander in the prayers, and the chief result is criticism of the sermon or the music. He repeats his private prayers, but chiefly as a habit, which, were he to leave off, he would be uncomfortable. His observance of these forms is compatible with real forgetfulness of God. It is forgetfulness if there is no earnest prayer, if the man is not influenced by the thought of God, if he acts much as he would act if there were no God.

Dear brethren, it is easy for all of us to understand what forgetfulness of God is; the question is, How shall we be saved from this evil, what contrary habit can we form? Now reflect; we

do not forget those whom we love ; the thought of them is welcome, is delightful ; they are a recurring subject of thought : when we have nothing else to do, the mind reverts to them ; we fancy what they are doing, we think over their letters, we plan what we shall say to them, we think of little pleasures we can give them, we dread dangers for them, we look ahead and are anxious for their future. So it is that a mother feels towards a much-loved son, or an attached sister towards a brother. Now, how can we get formed in our hearts the same, or rather a far more absorbing, interest in Him, whom we cannot love too much, who has no imperfections, who never forgets us, who is always studying our happiness and improvement ? May the Holy Spirit shed abroad in our hearts the love of God ; then we shall not forget Him, then the thought of Him will be welcome, delightful ; we shall trace His hand in what happens to us ; we shall connect Him with our meals, our health ; we shall go about our business in His strength ; we shall take to Him our difficulties, we shall commune with Him on all that befalls us.

The opposite to forgetting God is to set Him before our eyes, to walk with Him, to acknowledge Him, according to the many phrases which are used in Holy Scripture to denote the habits of godly men. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember Thee in Thy ways."

When we come across such expressions in Holy Scripture, let us bethink ourselves how we too can learn to emulate holy men of old, and live in recollection of God, in communion with God.

It is a case like that in the child's story of "eyes and no eyes." One man may walk about the world, and go through life, and find nothing to remind him of God. Man is all in all to him. Another has his eyes opened, and is always marking the interference of God, receiving a message from God, darting up praises to Him, admiring His works, and standing in awe of His judgments. The worldly man misses the true explanation of life; he sees only human agents, he leaves out the most important factor in all calculations. The godly man, on the contrary, rises to the contemplation of the Real Cause of events. He approaches the *true* Author of all that is done here. Peace and war, the rise and fall of kingdoms, life and death, sickness and health, these must be referred to God, would you know who it is that really disposes of them.

I suppose that, besides positive sin, which makes a man unwilling to remember God, there is no more copious cause of forgetfulness of God than the hurry and pressure of employment which men live in. Men complain that so many things have to be attended to, so many persons call, there are so many letters to write, that they have no time for thought, no leisure for devotion.

But possibly some of this work might be curtailed, possibly some of this pressure might be reduced. Men try too much, they attempt to be felt in too many spheres. Then, again, it is likely that more devotion would introduce quiet, composure, calmness, and along with this, order, patience, meekness; virtues which save time, which preserve the spirit from being fretted, and so economise power. The blessing of God rests almost visibly on some who go about all things in His strength, and to His glory.

Let us not think anything too small and insignificant to connect with Him. Let us avail ourselves of the various forms which still connect Him with daily life, and which should be more than forms to us. Let us learn to throw more feeling, more life, into family prayers, into grace before and after meals; into the various services we may be called upon to take part in, a marriage, a christening, a funeral. Let church spires, and church bells, and sacred pictures speak to us of Him.

In some primitive countries, the watchmen at night present some holy association with every hour which they announce. And we might carry out the same principle, though our habits are more reserved and less demonstrative. Your clock strikes, it tells you that you have to account for time. A friend wishes you good-bye or adieu, and you remember that the words have a holy meaning. You read an old will, and you find the testator begins with commending his

soul to God. You look on a coin, and you find "Dei gratia" on it. You sing the National Anthem, and you find it a prayer. In Christian countries religion is more or less interwoven with the details of life. It meets you at every turn. The sign of the cross is everywhere. The name of the Holy Trinity is for ever being mentioned. God help us to make use of these perpetual reminders; and when we are addressed with such words as "Hear His voice," "In all thy ways acknowledge Him," to reply with loving hearts, "The desire of our souls is to Thy name and to the remembrance of Thee. With my soul have I desired Thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek Thee early."

X.

WASTEFULNESS.

MID-LENT SUNDAY.

“Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.”

—JOHN vi. 12.

It is noticeable that a miracle connected with food should be chosen for our study during the great Lent fast. It is as if the Church would say, You are thinking about food, and the lesson of the day shall therefore turn on food.

We can also see why this Gospel was chosen for this particular Sunday; it is Mid-Lent, the middle of Lent, and it was thought well to lessen the severity of Lent by the indulgence of a more cheerful Sunday than the others. No Sundays, indeed, are fast days, not even the Sundays in Lent, but this Sunday was particularly claimed by the people as a refreshment, and in some parts of England used to be called “Mothering Day,” and be used as an occasion for children indulging themselves in home pleasures with their parents, hence the names “Refreshment Sunday,” “Mothering Day.”

Perhaps, too, there was a higher object, viz.,

to turn the thoughts to the true Food of man, in preparation for the Easter communion. We may be sure that our Lord's great object in performing this miracle was not merely to relieve those visible thousands, then exhausted by their attendance on His ministry, but to represent Himself as the Bread of Life to the multitudes of all future ages. The miracle was performed about this time of year. Multitudes from Galilee were streaming up to keep the Passover, and as only men were obliged to attend the Jewish feasts, this accounts for the number of males being so great that there was less need to reckon the women and children.

Probably all our Lord's miracles are, in a way, parables, *i.e.*, that great truths are shadowed out by them. On this occasion our Lord rewarded those who clave to Him, and forgot their own bodily wants in their spiritual hunger for the word of life. He made them first feel their need, and then He proceeded to supply it. He showed that He can spread a feast in a wilderness, *i.e.*, when all looks most barren, He can produce supplies from unexpected sources. He made all be seated in ranks, numbered and arranged, for He would show Himself the God of order. He gave thanks before distributing the food, thus lifting the transaction to a higher region, and "endowing the loaves with capacities which they did not before possess." "He distributes to His ministers, as to persons receiving gifts from Him for the benefit of others," "and by the interven-

tion of these ministers . . . the disciples receive the bread which had been blessed, and by which they are satisfied."

"Thus the mighty work of Christ in the midst of the wilderness is set forth before His Church in the midst of Lent, as a sure token that the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; and that both fasting and abundance are at His command, and still more as an earnest of that Divine gift the 'Bread from heaven,' which He distributes to His people in the wilderness of this world, by the hands of ministers, for spiritual refreshment and strength."

I will not to-day insist on the connection of all this with the Eucharist. In order to go into that we should have to proceed to our Lord's discourse in the synagogue at Capernaum, when He unfolded the typical character of this miracle, and avowed Himself the Bread of Life, Who had come down from heaven to give life to the world.

I wish to-day to treat of a humbler subject implied in the words of the text, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." If the wonderful miracle manifested our Lord's Godhead, this direction no less clearly set forth His manhood. Our Lord would have the broken victuals preserved. Each apostle, according to the custom of the Jews of that day, travelled with a basket, and in their baskets these fragments were to be stored up. And why? I doubt not in order to be eaten by our Lord and His apostles. He would work no miracle for Himself. He and

His apostles seemed to have lived on charity, to have had a common purse, to have been supported by such persons as St. Mary Magdalen and the other devout women who ministered to the Lord of their substance. Our Lord disdained not the humblest food. He would live on pieces. He thus gives us a lesson against daintiness and desire for luxuries.

And methinks He would also give us a lesson against wastefulness. Gather up the fragments. He would have nothing lost, nothing wasted.

Let me take this as a Lenten subject to which to direct your attention to-night. It is well to make Lent a time for surmounting faults; let the one which we to-day think of be wastefulness.

It might be shown that waste is opposed to the plans on which God regulates the material universe. He turns all things to account; what one animal rejects, another delights in, what is not good for one purpose serves another, each thing has its use. I do not deny that there is apparent waste, *e.g.*, many seeds produced which do not vegetate, but things which do not serve the primary object for which they were created, serve a secondary one; and it is a fallen world, man's sin seems to have run over and damaged creation, and man's arrangements or want of arrangement interfere with the Divine economy, the housekeeping of the universe; yet nothing is lost; it may not serve the use it should have served, but it is not wasted. In nature there is no waste.

Now, how is it with man, fallen man, ourselves? Are we never to blame for wasting money, or time, or health, or opportunities, or means of grace? have we not need to lay to heart the injunction, "Gather up the fragments that remain"? Lent will soon be over, life is slipping by, years are fleeting past.

Wastefulness—I dare say you can think of many persons who seem to you to be wasteful: like most faults we observe it in others, but are unconscious of it in ourselves. Young gentleman, *e.g.*, at public schools are very wasteful, things are broken by them for mischief. All children, I suppose, unless watched are inclined to be mischievous, they break things from a delight in destructiveness. In the large establishments of the rich, we fancy there is often much waste; a great deal of good food which poor widows and orphans would be thankful for is thrown away, owing to daintiness and the prodigal carelessness which goes with superabundance.

When we reflect on the prevalence of intemperance in our country, we must admit there is great waste, waste of millions of money which might have been better spent, which would have clothed wives, educated children, apprenticed children, set a man up in business, made a provision for sickness and for old age. The intemperate waste money which might have provided institutions at home, and done something to convert the heathen abroad.

There is much wastefulness in the way money is spent upon other things besides drink. It were easy to raise a cry against the extravagance of some persons, the sums of money spent on dress, the money wasted by gamblers and persons betting. But to-night I am not thinking so much of large misappropriations as of inconsiderateness and carelessness, which neglects things because they are small, and hardly seem of sufficient importance to bring Christian principle to bear upon them. In the grand establishments where there is waste, it is no particular pleasure to any one, it arises from neglect, from the difficulty of attending to details. The heads of the establishment would find it very difficult to make an alteration. Improvement can only be brought about by the humbler members seeing the wisdom and the duty of making a conscience of everything, doing all to the glory of God, thinking nothing too small to be sanctified.

But besides waste of money, and goods, and food, there is such a thing as waste of time. As the great God looks down from heaven and surveys His children on earth, there is no gift which He sees more commonly squandered than time. We know when our money goes, there are so many less pieces in the purse, we can see it go, we know how we spent our money, and what we got for it; but our time, *that* runs away, we know not how. Twenty-four hours in the day—the best people could give but a poor account of them.

Time is wasted by lying in bed, when we ought to get up; by wandering thoughts when the attention ought to be fixed on another subject; by unprofitable talk; by unprofitable reading.

The question is, How to waste no more time? and, I think, we should not waste time, had we a strong, overmastering passion in us, if the love of God, the love of Christ, were intense in us; then our hearts would be an altar of sacrifice, from which there would always be rising up what is acceptable to God; we should be often darting up prayers, often welcoming the suggestions of the Holy Spirit. Not that a religious man need be always thinking of God—probably he has got his business to attend to, he must do his duty by his employers, he must concentrate his attention on the matter before him—but if he is really godly, his time will not run away in an objectless, senseless manner, of which he can give no account, his faculties will be braced up, he will have power over his thoughts, and, when he is at leisure, it will be a pleasure to him to revert to thoughts of God.

Think next of opportunities. I am afraid there is often a great waste of them. We lose opportunities of doing kindnesses, of speaking a word in season, of expressing sympathy. Waste of opportunities—it is a large subject. What a waste is it when young people throw away the time for education! It is commonly supposed that, while people are at school and college, with tutors or governesses, then they have opportuni-

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ties which do not recur again; and how many throw away these opportunities, take a dislike to their teachers, or a disgust to the studies allotted them, or turn off to some self-chosen pursuit, waste time in excessive athletics, or novel reading, or gossip, or chatting; and the precious period, in which so much mental wealth might have been acquired, comes to an end, and they have missed their chance, and are empty, unfurnished, unprepared for the duties and difficulties of life!

Alas! in Lent we ought to examine ourselves, confess our faults, and, among them, sins of omission, this wasting of opportunities. Many of you have perhaps had an opportunity of doing good to others which you have wasted. A companion was in low spirits and inclined for religious conversation, but you dissipated his seriousness; he proposed a good effort which you did not second; he would have done some good deed if you would have shared the attempt with him. Oh, we have all much to answer for, many an opportunity we never saw which we might have seen. "He that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster."

There is another thing which persons sometimes waste—that is, the affection bestowed on them, or ready to be bestowed, if they would but elicit it. A mother's love is often thus wasted; it was intended to act on the side of virtue, to be a potent influence for good, but the man knew not its value till it was gone. And as we go through life, God, in His mercy, often makes

us, as it were, the offer of kind hearts, which we may win by a response, or chill by neglect. Many may have been inclined to be friends to us, and good friends too, whom we have alienated.

But there is yet another description of waste: the means of grace, sacraments, sermons, Holy Scripture, festivals, fasts, anniversaries—what a waste is here! How does God complain of His people of old, “Judge betwixt me and my vineyard; what could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?” The fig-tree in the parable wasted its opportunity, though the husbandman dug about it, and took every means to make it fruitful.

How are sermons wasted! There is great reason to fear that many sermons do little good. Would you avoid this for the future? Then do not come in a critical spirit, thinking of the preacher’s manner, ability, or originality; but look on the sermon as God’s instrument for teaching, and hearken for a message from Him. Look for something to act out. Think of a sermon afterwards. This very sermon to-night, ask God to make it of use to you, or at least pray for a blessing on the preacher. Let something come of it.

Waste of other means of grace—Holy Communion, *e.g.* We believe that at Holy Communion God draws near to men. If they come properly prepared, He conveys a gift which may be developed; but it needs stirring up, needs nursing, pondering. A man should recur to the subject, he

should in thought fall back on it, and sustain the intercourse; the disciple hearing the voice of the Master, and replying to it.

Dear brethren, on this subject of not wasting, our Lord Jesus is a great example. He made use of the opportunity when the woman of Samaria came to draw water from the well where He was resting. When the disciples pointed out to Him the stones of the temple, when some mentioned the fate of the Galileans slaughtered by Pilate, when a person exclaimed how good it would be to eat bread in the kingdom of heaven, when one asked Him to interfere about an inheritance, He made use of each opportunity. He was always ready to turn to account the opportunity, to make the incident an occasion for introducing the highest truths, thence His teaching is so full of images, similitudes, and parables. He had ever looked on life in its connection with God. If our hearts are often communing with Him, making offerings to Him of what we do, we shall not waste time, money, opportunities, or means of grace; we shall think nothing too small to be sanctified, we shall do all to the glory of God, we shall not despise little things, not be slothful or wasters, but gather up the fragments—fragments of time, fragments that remain in our minds from the books we have read, the sermons we have heard; we shall gather up the broken pieces and take them to Him to bless them, that nothing be lost.

XI.

THE BARREN FIG-TREE.

PASSION-TIDE.

“And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever.”—MARK xi. 14.

OUR Lord's conduct on this occasion was peculiar, for His miracles were generally of an obviously beneficent nature, and of course an infidel may here find occasion for presumptuous censure; but let us, on the contrary, approach the subject with deep reverence, assured that every action of the Redeemer will bear the closest study; and the more it is looked into, the more will it reveal to us of His gentleness and patience, as well as of His power and wisdom.

We are to understand that our Saviour had passed the night at Bethany, a village about a mile and a half from Jerusalem, where lived the family that He loved, Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha. He started thence, to walk over the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem, so early in the morning that He had not partaken of food. He, who was very man in all the infirmities of

our nature, hungers. He sees growing by the roadside one fig-tree, conspicuous from afar on account of its having a profusion of leaves. It was too early in the year for fig-trees generally to be bearing fruit, but, as the early figs come before the leaves, this tree ought to have furnished figs as it exhibited leaves; but it was a disappointing tree, it had nothing but leaves; it promised but did not perform, it excited hopes but disappointed them, it made an ostentatious profession of being before others, but its juices had run to waste in showy display, and it yielded no solid performance. "And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever."

What we suppose to have been the chief lesson of this incident—and which I shall treat as such—was *not* brought out immediately. But our Lord's denunciation of the tree, and the effect which followed, at once made a great impression on the apostles, and He turned it to immediate account, by setting forth to them the power of faith, and the efficacy of prayer. His power should be conveyed to His Church. That which they had seen Him do, they should be able to do themselves. Faith should remove mountains. "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." The disciples were about to see Him suffer in what would appear the extremity of weakness; they would be tempted to think that all His powers had failed Him, and that He did not save Himself because

He could not; then would this miracle be of use to support their tottering faith, and they would remember that one word of His was felt as all-powerful in the domain of nature.

But I doubt not that the whole transaction was chiefly typical. The one prominent tree growing in the conspicuous place "in the way" represented the Jewish nation, the people of God. As that tree had outrun others, and anticipated the summer, so the Jews had had advantages long before the rest of the world. They had types and prophecies, the temple, the law, the Scriptures, Christ Himself; there was reason to seek some result from all this, some real fruit, and all the more because they made a great display of the externals of religion. The favourite school was that of the Pharisees, their temper predominated in the nation, there was a great zeal for long prayers, expensive sacrifices, minute observances, for pilgrimages to Jerusalem, for the letter of Holy Scripture, great boasting in the Messiah whom they expected, their own favour with God, and superiority over the Gentiles.

But there was no fruit: it was an immoral age, divorce was common, covetousness was prevalent, religion was looked upon as a political matter, as the strength of the national combination, the bond of the great Jewish interest scattered throughout the world, and so the means of bringing profit to Jerusalem. God was not known in His holiness, or loved as a just, pure God. When His Son appeared, He was hated, because the rulers felt

that His influence went to destroy theirs ; and the sins of the rulers were shared by the people.

This was the state of things when our Lord came as it were hungering, desiring to see some return for all the pains which had been taken with the race since the call of Abraham, the exodus from Egypt, the giving of the law on Sinai. He was, so to say, disappointed, defrauded of what He had a right to expect. And for their warning, He would set forth the punishment which their sin was sure to provoke, unless they repented. He would curse this *tree* as a type of the curse which the *nation* would incur. Glory to Him for His gentleness, that when He would exhibit His anger at sin and the fearfulness of its punishment, He displayed it by means of a senseless, inanimate tree. He would make this exception to the general character of His miracles. Nearly all of them were festive, benevolent, relieving distress, elevating to a higher element. He had shown Himself sympathetic with all man's wants, and able to operate in every department of nature. His miracles generally had suited the character of that first advent, when He came not to judge but to save. He had marked the time of His espousals to the Church, by mitigating human sorrow, and healing body and soul. But men must be warned of punishment and judgment to come. They must learn that He who now pleads will hereafter speak in a different tone, that it is not from want of power or determination to punish that He is patient and long-suffering.

“Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever.” We see the curse, and it is easy to trace its fulfilment. That Jewish system, then in its pride and glory, came to an end forty years after. The temple was burnt, the walls of the city thrown down, the people scattered, and still they are under a cloud, without a country, without sacrifices, without a priesthood, their name a by-word, unable to understand their own position, but telling plainly to the Christian of their sin, its punishment, and the only possible way of getting it reversed.

But we may be quite sure that it was our Lord's intention to give a much more general warning. That one tree was to read a lesson to hundreds of thousands of men in all ages. The withering of one plant was to save souls in all countries. Here are lessons for all of us. The Saviour hungers. He desires some moral and spiritual result which shall give Him pleasure. He desires to see men whom He can regard with satisfaction. We hear of His saying on another occasion, “Give me to drink;” now it is He hungers—a similar image to set forth His intense desire to have converts whom He can regard with approbation. He comes to us, dear brethren, hungering for something which He can enjoy, looking for it, searching for it. He would enjoy a broken heart, a contrite spirit, real devotion, *i.e.*, dedication of our powers to His service, faith, prayer, love to man, victory over faults, patience, gentleness—in short, the fruit of the

Spirit ; for this He hungers. Apply it to yourselves, say, He hungers for something from me ; am I furnishing it to Him ? He has the more reason to expect this where there is a show of religion, from church-goers like you. You are, like the fig-tree, making more profession than others. Too many in this country neglect church altogether, you do not. We live in a time when there has been some revival of religion ; churches are better attended, services are more frequent. Let us take care that it be not with us a case of leaves only, no fruit. And if ever this warning was specially emphasised, it is in Lent and Holy Week. How many are now attending special services, coming out from the rest of the world by a more professed interest in the Saviour's work ? And shall He after all find leaves only, no fruit—*i.e.*, only outward observances, but no sweetness of temper, no growth in grace, no real humility, no charity, in St. Paul's sense of the word ?

Let us not provoke Him to smite us with the curse of sterility. It is a fearful thing for nations, churches, societies, individuals, when God smites them with barrenness, when the decree goes forth, "No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever."

A nation may be cursed with sterility. Things look like it when it does no more good in the family of nations, when it contributes nothing to human progress, no discoveries, no men of genius, no examples, when it wages war with no evils, works out no problems. The traveller visits it,

but brings back no lessons from it ; he is only impressed with the degeneracy of the upper classes, the immorality of the clergy, the ignorance of the people. We fear a blight rests on a nation like this.

So again, a church may be cursed with sterility. It may cease to send forth vigorous foreign missions ; it may lose its hold on its own people ; sects and heresies may multiply ; differences may be pushed to extremes among its own children ; it may have no power to adapt itself to the times, may produce no saints, may be ill off for rulers ; there may be a general torpor ; men's standard of duty may be lowered ; the springs of influence, the schools and universities of the land, may be poisoned ; you fear that such a church is under a blight ; you tremble lest the word has gone forth, " No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever."

A society, an institution, in like manner, may be smitten with barrenness ; it may bustle and make a parade, and yet effect next to nothing. " Except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it." You can conceive a school turning out no useful men, a publishing society producing no valuable books, a church-building society languishing and losing supporters, an hospital so badly managed that it is a scandal ; and, in like manner, you can imagine many a society, guild, confraternity, disappointing spectators, making a great show, and yet afflicted with sterility ; it is without God's blessing. For some

reason or other, He hides His face, and denies that which alone can cause fruitfulness.

And so with the individual: there is the teacher who is doing no good; his influence is rather injurious than otherwise; he makes men frivolous, indolent, irreverent. There is the clergyman whose ministry leads to no conversions, no progress, no growth in grace. There may be crowded churches, public applause, great excitement, and yet sterility.

Dear brethren, lay this subject, I pray you, to heart; consider whether you are not like the Jews, like that fig-tree by the wayside, in a prominent position, and whether you have not had advantages beyond others. Perhaps you have grown up in a Christian family, you know some who, you are sure, are good Christians, you have had truth set before you in a variety of ways, by books, sermons, preparation for confirmation. You have been to Holy Communion, your prayers have been heard. The Saviour hungers for fruit from you—the fruit of the season, what you ought, at your time of life, to furnish, the particular duty incumbent on you now. He comes examining, searching, requiring, hungering. You will recreate Him, if you furnish Him with something He can take pleasure in. You will disappoint Him, if He is obliged to say, “Only leaves, no fruit; only a promise, no performance.” Many have been very promising at one period of life. Time was when their friends expected a good deal from them; they began

well, they learned quickly, they incurred some opprobrium for conscience' sake, they gave largely, but they have disappointed expectations; they have lost their first love, the world has been too strong for them, they have come to do what no one would have supposed possible, they have persuaded themselves that a line of conduct is necessary which once they would have deemed inadmissible. Even man is disappointed with them, how much more God?

“No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever.” What a punishment! Not to be useful, to be a cumberer of the ground. Dear brethren, many of you long to be useful; you feel energy, you like work. To be condemned to a life of inactivity would be the greatest of punishments to you. Yet God alone gives the power to work, the desire to work, the field to work in; and He alone can make the work effectual, not labour in vain. Paul may plant, and Apollos water; He alone can give the increase.

“No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever.” Why, it is the very sentence of hell: “hereafter for ever.” Thank God that the word was only spoken to a tree, which was soon to be cut down and cast into the fire. Thank God that it was spoken, for the uttering it to the tree may save us. Let us turn to Him Who is all merciful, confessing our past unfruitfulness, how often we have disappointed Him, what little proportion our fruit has borne to our leaves, our performance to our promises, and let us pray Him, at this Passion-

tide, as a fruit of His passion, to renew our life, pruning us indeed if need be, but reversing the sentence, and instead of a curse pronouncing a blessing, and saying, Be thou a fruitful tree in the garden of the Lord, and let multitudes eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever.

XII.

FRUIT OF THE PASSION.

EASTER.

“ Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone : but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”—JOHN xii. 24.

OUR Lord's ministry lasted, we think, three years ; this is not absolutely certain, but, by comparing one passage with another, we infer that this was the case. Now consider what wonderful results have been produced by those three years. No other number of years have produced equal results, no other three hundred, no other three thousand. Our Lord's influence was condensed into those three years. The first thirty years of His life He was comparatively unfelt. He collected no followers. He wrote no books. We suppose He delivered no discourses. He lived in an obscure village, perhaps wrought as a carpenter. All His influence on mankind is due to the three years of His public ministry, except so far as—to speak of Him, as we might, if He were simply like other men—the first thirty years was the time of preparation for work, a time of learning

obedience, practising submission to His Father's will.

But the three years—see what fruit they have borne! His teaching, such as that contained in the Sermon on the Mount, has moulded the conduct of, I think, we may safely say, millions; has not only been adopted as a code, a theory, a rule, but has been exemplified in the noble, pure lives of millions. The apostles whom He trained proved competent to be wise and able and brave heads of the society which He founded. The miracles which He wrought have lived in men's memories, suggested hopes, supplied painters with subjects, encouraged the foundation of hospitals. The parables which He spoke are studied by the wisest, and catch the attention of the rudest of mankind.

The prayer which He drew up for His disciples, who shall say how many tens of millions of times it has been put up, not as a mere form, without thought, but in all earnestness! The sacraments He instituted, what have not they been! to say nothing of the grace which He has conveyed through them, even in their outward surroundings, what an important part have they played in the history of mankind! They have led to catechising, and so had an effect on education, have produced treatises, controversies, caused councils to be assembled, agitated nations, led to buildings, such as baptisteries and chancels, have told on art, have produced the sponsorial relationships, have prompted hymns and music.

There can be no doubt of the wide and abiding influence of those three years. But what has made them influential? What but the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus? The death removed the mysterious obstacle which separated man from God. Till that death an expiation was due, an atonement was needed, justice had to be satisfied, God had to be reconciled, Satan had too much power, the Being of God was very imperfectly revealed.

But the voluntary death of the Son of God, His self-sacrifice, put mankind in a new position. There was now a Man on whom the eye of Heaven could rest with perfect satisfaction, in whom God was well pleased; that Man was installed as Head of the race, a second Adam, a new Father of the family who were to proceed from Him. The loving-kindness of God expended itself on Him; there was nothing He did not deserve, nothing He should not receive. He came back from the grave with the powers of Godhead no longer in abeyance. He came back to act no longer according to the restrictions which He had imposed on Himself during those previous three and thirty years; no longer to confine Himself to man's condition, to be seen only in one place, heard only by one company, teaching a handful of men; but He was to act henceforth in the plenitude of Godhead. He was to give efficacy to the work of those three years of His ministry, He was to fill His sacraments with grace, to make them channels for conveying and renewing

life, for imparting the life that was in Himself to His members. He was to write His new law on the heart, *i.e.*, to work it into the mind, to make it men's pleasure to obey. He was to perform to the end of time moral miracles, corresponding to those first physical ones. The apostles He had trained were to perpetuate a succession to the end of time. The society He founded was to be never broken up. The prayer He had issued, whenever earnestly offered, should be supported by His own intercession. The cross He died on should be for ever dear. Not only the literal cross should be honoured, be worn as an ornament and decoration, be lifted high over cities, wave in banners, be the ground-plan of cathedrals; but far more important than these outward effects, men should carry out the idea of the cross, call their trials crosses, take them up in His Spirit, bear them meekly, patiently, as He had borne His. His death-day should be observed every week. The day of His resurrection should be a weekly festival. And these again should be mere outward tokens of inward effects produced on men's lives and characters. His death bore fruit in a death to sin, in a crucifying of the flesh, in the mortification of what is sensual and worldly. His resurrection took effect in enabling men to look up to God as a reconciled Father; to walk in the light of His countenance, to rise to newness of life; to put off the old man, and put on the new; to reproduce the character of the Lord Jesus; to go about doing good like

Him ; to bear pain like Him ; to die with faith and resignation, and forgiveness of enemies like Him ; like Him they should look forward to a resurrection, commending the soul to a Father's hands, considering the grave as a sleeping-place, wherein to wait till the time come for the resurrection of the flesh, the restoration of the body, till the return of the soul to be clothed again with a tabernacle, even as the human soul of the Lord Jesus returned to reanimate His sacred body.

Dear brethren, think what the first Easter was to the disciples of old, and what this present Easter may be to us. How did Joseph of Arimathea feel on the Saturday ? Surely it was the happiest day he had ever spent. True, his life was endangered, his riches were endangered. He had made virulent enemies of powerful men. He would soon be deprived of all the honours he had hitherto enjoyed. Men would be shy of him ; he would lose the sympathy of his own class. He had fallen out of one circle ; and what was that other circle into which he might hope to be received ? These Galileans, humble and despised men, would soon return to Galilee. Whom would he have as friends ? Well, there was the family at Bethany. There was Nicodemus, perhaps as wealthy as himself—and the wealthier he was, the more certain to be attacked by the irritated high priest and rulers of the Jews. But for all that, Joseph of Arimathea was a happy man.

He had much to regret on account of previous cowardice. He had lost many opportunities. He

had not drunk in our Lord's teaching as he might have done. He had not had that intimate personal converse which He might have enjoyed, but a feeling of satisfaction could not but steal over him. There was one opportunity which he had *not* lost. That fortunate possession of a grave close at hand had been providential. His looking forward to death had been blessed to him. He had thought how happy it would be to lay his bones near the holy city; and now, though his bones would never lie there, though he should soon be a proscribed exile, detested as a renegade, that sepulchre had been infinitely more valuable than all his other possessions, it had stood him in good stead. It had occurred to him that he could do a little to atone for past cowardice, if now he offered to the dead Christ some compensation for the homage which he had withheld from the living Messiah. He overleapt the prejudices of his class. He surmounted his fear of Pilate. The dreaded interview was over, and on the Saturday—the Sabbath—Joseph was a happy man. His colleagues of the Sanhedrin were agitated with fears, they had been impressed by the mysterious darkness, by the rending of the veil of the temple, by Judas' death, by the earthquake; they liked not the effect produced on the centurion and the bystanders, they were struck by the desertion of such men as Nicodemus and this Joseph, they knew not what might be coming, what would be next.

Compared with them, Joseph of Arimathea

was happy on the Saturday, but what was he to-day? Did the news reach him? I think it did—at least so far that certain-women of that company had been early at the sepulchre, and when they found not the Lord's body had gone back, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that He was alive. If others went to the sepulchre that day, I think Joseph also went. Happy man, that his was the tomb, that was indeed new, what never a tomb had been before, the birthplace of life, the scene where the mighty Soul of the Redeemer, fresh from the harrowing of hell, fresh from triumphs in the unseen world, fresh from the satisfaction of receiving the penitent in Paradise, fresh from the gratulations of prophets and patriarchs, already attended by hosts of angels, resumed its flesh. His tomb was the scene where that Soul resumed the flesh, which had been laid down mangled, but now came forth glorious, which had been sown in weakness, but was now raised in power, which came forth not only living, but life giving, the first-born from the dead, the first-fruits of the great harvest of the redeemed family.

Slowly did those first believers learn what Easter was to them; and slowly do any of us learn what it is to us. As we grow older, and death must be nearer, our thoughts ought to be more busy as to the unseen world, the paradise state, the resurrection body. But it by no means follows that because people should think more

on these subjects, they will do so. Let us seek grace to draw our minds to them.

When we lose friends by death, the bereavement should draw our minds more to these topics. Sometimes in the full swing of life, there is borne away from us the brightest of our acquaintances, the most cherished, most useful, most admired, most full of life, one who could least be spared ; and we ask what has become of the warm feelings, the keen intellect, the glowing affections of one who was with us one day, and was gone the next ? What should we answer, if we did not know of the new tomb, and Him that lay in it ? Glory be to Him for all the comfort which at this season He supplies to mourners.

For ourselves, what can we wish for more than that His death and resurrection may bear fruit in ourselves. If I were to select an Easter wish for yourselves and myself, it should be this, that our Easter communion, the sacrament of this day, may have the same effect on us which the first administration had on the party gathered in the upper chamber, where the Saviour instituted the sacrament, on the eve of His passion. They were imperfect men, faithful but frail, those eleven to whom he then imparted His body and blood. But see what His grace made of them ? Were there ever afterwards men more forgetful of themselves, more full of love to Him, more brave to endure hardness for His sake, more burning to communicate the knowledge of Him to others ? May all those four points be reproduced in us.

I pray it for you, do you pray it for your clergy, for me and my colleagues in the ministry in this parish. God make us all (1) forgetful of self, neglectful of our own interests, comforts, luxuries, reputation ; (2) penetrated with intense love for the Saviour, a personal attachment about which there can be no mistake, as warm, nay warmer, than the truest earthly attachment. (3) May He make us brave to suffer, to make sacrifices, to take up our cross. (4) May He fire us with zeal to draw in others, to seek the lost, to compel men to come in, to win from intemperance, to reclaim to virtue, to convert the heathen, to propagate truth, that by our means the Saviour may see of the travail of His soul, and be compensated for His sufferings.

XIII.

THE INDWELLING SPIRIT.

WHITSUNTIDE.

“*Crise not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*”—*EPH. iv. 30.*

I PROPOSE to speak to-day of three points—the Day of Redemption, the Seal, and Grieving the Spirit.

1. The Saviour has acquired for Himself a right and a title to an inheritance, which He has not yet fully entered upon. He is somewhat in the position of a purchaser, who has the title-deeds of an estate, but has not yet taken possession of it. A day is coming, called in the text the day of redemption, when the Lord Jesus will put an end to the present state of suspense, during which His rights are in abeyance, and His claims unrecognised by the world. He will then take to Himself His kingdom. He will then reign visibly. His people shall be brought together—their souls from paradise, their bodies from the ends of the earth and the deep sea. They shall rise with glorified bodies, like unto the glorified body with which

He arrayed Himself that spring-day in Palestine—the first Easter Sunday—when the first act of the general resurrection took place, and the Captain, the Prince, the Leader of the hosts of the Redeemed exhibited, in His own Person, the first effect of His triumph over Satan and death. He then burst forth from the riven tomb in all the majesty of a spiritual body, invisible to the unpurged eye—a body that needed not food or rest, insusceptible of pain, decay, or death. And with some such bodies shall His followers rise, all who have believed on Him, given themselves to Him, and whom He shall own as faithful soldiers and servants. They shall be brought together, though before they may have been separated by living in different ages of the world's existence—though they may have lived in different regions on the earth's surface—though they have spoken different languages, and had no means of communication with each other while they were in the flesh. They shall be brought together, though they belonged to different stations in life, and had, while in the mortal body, no more means of intercourse and sympathy than exist between the prince and the peasant. Nay, they shall be brought together, and shall appreciate each other, see each other's merits, and delight in each other's graces and virtues; though here, in this present state of existence, they even misunderstood and opposed each other, belonged to opposite parties in politics, or different schools in religion. They shall then recognise merits which now prejudices and im-

perfections prevent their discerning. Thus much, at least, we know about that day of redemption, but this is only a preliminary. That day is the opening of a never-ending series of days, and who shall tell us how that world shall be ordered, on which God's people shall then enter? We know not how they shall be arranged, with whom they shall be associated, where they shall dwell, how they shall be employed, how they shall make progress, advance, improve, grow more holy, and become more intensely happy.

We may well believe that a portion of God's government shall be conducted through them, that the life of worship shall not be their only employment, that they shall enjoy the society of angels, but the dearest joy of each will be to live under the eye of the God-Man, the Head of the human race, to be raised to such a moral and spiritual condition as to be able to sustain intercourse with Him, to have no sin within for His eye to detect, no cloud interposing itself between their human souls and His all-knowing scrutiny.

Such, I believe, is the meaning of the day of redemption spoken of in the text. That such a day is secured is wholly owing to the sacrifice of Calvary, which the justice of God requires should be compensated. We have considered the first point, the day of redemption.

2. But the Lord Jesus, looking forward to this glorious recompense, desires a people with whom to share His inheritance. He, the head, is incomplete without His members. The reward

which He values is the power of having others with Him, making them like Himself, educating, training, qualifying them to enjoy that which is being prepared for the great company of which He is the leader. Those whom He destines to share His inheritance He marks as His own, and qualifies for their future by bestowing on them His Holy Spirit. This is likened in the text to the affixing a seal—"The Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." Kings of old used their signet rings in attestation of their regal acts. It is the act of the heavenly King to give the Holy Spirit. None but He can bestow grace, that subtle, invisible, mysterious communication by which the Spirit of God touches the human spirit. If a man becomes so pure, loving, gentle, brave, unworldly, unselfish, as to prove, to himself or others, that there is a work of grace going on in his heart, that a supernatural power is assisting him, then, to use this figure, God's seal on the soul is recognised. We believe, indeed, that to the infant God gives His Holy Spirit in baptism, but the gift may be so neglected, the fire quenched, the breath stifled, that, in the man's behaviour, there may be little trace of his having received the gift. It may be in the process of being withdrawn, the branch may be withering, the life dying out.

But, thank God, it is sometimes otherwise; a man may show unmistakable signs of resemblance to Christ, may forgive enemies as Christ forgave, doing kindnesses to those who have

injured him; he may be very humble while you feel that he, if any man, might think much of himself, may be self-denying, sympathetic, to an extent which makes you feel he has a Christian character. That word which we use, "character," is Greek for a stamp, a mark, an impression. The man has been sealed, Christ has made His mark on him. None but Christ could have done it. There has been an outstretching of the hand of power, the nail-imprinted hand which blesses, which executes regal acts, that hand has impressed a seal. In other words, there has been an action of God's Spirit on the man's spirit producing conformity to Christ, making the man bear pain in the spirit of the Crucified, making him toil for the poor after the pattern of Him who went about doing good, making him delight in prayer, making him war with abuses, resist Satan, as none can do but one in whom Christ dwells by His Spirit. This is the meaning of being sealed with the Holy Spirit of God unto the day of redemption.

We have attended to the words, "day of redemption," and "sealed with the Spirit;" let us now meditate on another word in the text, "Grieve not" the Spirit.

3. The expression represents to us the tenderness of God the Holy Ghost, how distressed He will be if we go wrong. It signifies that we cannot sin without inflicting pain on Him, that He will be disappointed, if, having taken up His abode in us, He is not regarded as is His due. It is a royal guest who vouchsafes to dwell in us.

Sometimes you hear of a subject entertaining his sovereign as his guest. You visit the mansion of a nobleman of ancient lineage; you are told how, on some occasion long ago, this or that king or queen occupied a chamber which is shown you. You can fancy what preparations were made to receive them, what expense gone to; new furniture procured, new arrangements devised, and time and trouble lavished to make the abode acceptable to the royal visitor. The memory of the visit is preserved for centuries, though the sovereign may have only tarried a night, and his own character may have been noways particularly admirable. But how incomparably higher the honour which the King of kings does to the human soul when He vouchsafes to dwell in it—to dwell in it not for a time only, but as long as He is not expelled; to dwell in it not passively, but with the exertion of power, continually refining, expanding, purifying, making it daily more fit for His abode.

Grieve not the Spirit, thwart not His gracious intentions, defeat not His object. We are all grieved if our kindness is rejected, if our gifts are spurned, if we are received with coldness where we had a right to look for warmth, if we are treated with ingratitude. A good man is grieved in proportion to the extent of the benefits which he meant to have conferred, when he knows how happy he could have made the object of his affection. It may be a son, whom he would fain have trained to happiness and useful-

ness ; it may be a pupil whom he could have put on the road to success ; it may be a friend whom he could have saved from destruction, if only his advice had been followed.

In proportion to our goodness, love, and power to benefit, is our distress if our assistance is rejected, and all our pains spent in vain. Samuel mourned for Saul. Many a father, many a mother, mourn for a stubborn son, who will not be guided aright ; how much more does the Spirit of God grieve, for He knows, as man cannot know, the issues at stake ; He knows the bliss of which we are capable, the degradation, deterioration, woe, into which we may sink !

Let each ask himself how it is possible for him to grieve the Spirit ; how, on the other hand, it is conceivable that he may gratify Him. Many persons are much pained to hurt another's feelings. They would not do so, if they could help it, towards any living man, woman, or child ; but they do not sufficiently remember that every sin hurts as it were God's feelings, grieves the Holy Spirit. We grieve Him if we resist the voice of conscience ; *e.g.*, if the voice bids us rise promptly from bed in the morning, and we do not rise ; if the voice bids eat and drink in moderation, and we are not moderate ; if the voice bids rebuke or protest against sin and we are silent ; if the voice bids give a certain sum in charity, and we give less ; if the voice bids beg that person's pardon, and we do not do so ; if the voice bids confess that fraud, and we do not confess it ; if the voice

bids make restitution, and we refuse to restore. In this way the loving, tender, delicate-minded Spirit of God is daily and hourly grieved. Alas ! He is also grieved by insubordination, irreverence, criticism of our superiors ; by the contemptuous expressions which men of opposite schools employ against those who think differently from themselves.

Reflect on the opposite course : how to gratify the Holy Spirit. Holy Scripture often speaks of pleasing God. We may conduct ourselves so as to afford satisfaction to the good God who condescends to interest Himself in our well-doing. We shall please Him if we listen for His suggestions, seek His mind upon all that turns up, lay it before Him in prayer, and try to know His will with regard to it. Do not go on in your own self-willed course, doing merely what you like, what you choose, what will please, you think, yourselves. You must learn to please Another ; that Other is your truest well-wisher. He knows what is for your good ; He would fain lead you on ; He will help you over difficulties ; He will strengthen your weakness, if you apply to Him. .

It is one of the highest prerogatives of the human spirit, that it is capable of receiving communications from the Divine Spirit : esteem this your highest honour that you are susceptible of spiritual influence ; and seek it, put yourselves in the way of obtaining it. "To him that hath shall more be given." Cherish the gift, and God will increase it. He gives at first the earnest of

the Spirit, an instalment. To those who make use of His early gifts, He gives larger subsequent ones.

God grant us all to have so real and large a portion of God's Spirit in us, that we may be able to recognise it as God's gift, His own testimony that we are His, that so we may rejoice, and bring forth that fruit of the Spirit, joy. If the Spirit of God be grieved, what lasting element of joy have we to count upon? It is a poor trust to depend on the buoyancy of youth, on powers of intellect, on a loving wife, dear children, or the good things of this life. We have to leave them, or they have to leave us; even while they stay, the very power of enjoyment may be dried up. Beware of hewing cisterns which hold no water. Better seek the unfailing supply which the Saviour has promised as a well of water, not external to the man, but inward, personal, inseparable, springing up to everlasting life.

Remember that the Holy Spirit is grieved by the neglect of His suggestions. If good suggestions are made by a sermon, by a book, by a parent, by a teacher, by a friend, the Holy Spirit is grieved if we neglect them. The way not to neglect them is to act on them at once without loss of time. This seems to me a period in the Church's history when many suggestions are offered to us, bearing on personal religion and growth in holiness. Self-examination, meditation, and other religious practices, are urged with un-

usual force. Retreats are suggested. There is a multiplicity of good books. In the circles in which many of us mix, there is no lack of good examples. Let us not grieve the Holy Spirit by not rising at the calls made on us. "To whomsoever much is given, of him much will be required." Respect the seal where you can discern it on others. Take care that it be not obliterated in yourselves. Come before God in the Holy Communion in a soft, receptive frame, that the stamp may be again impressed on you. Live in the thought of the day of redemption; then shall you not fear to suffer in the flesh, if God's seal should have to be set on you, as it is set on many, through suffering.

XIV.

N A B A L.

“He is such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him.”

—1 SAM. xxv. 17.

THERE is a great deal in the character of Nabal, of whom these words were said, which may suggest warning at the present day, after the lapse of nearly three thousand years. We understand him to have been a rich man, as riches were reckoned in those days. The man was very great, and he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. He was also of illustrious lineage, belonging to the stock of the good Caleb, the courageous spy, who alone of the twelve (except Joshua) re-entered the land of promise, and, after seeing Canaan yield to Jehovah's all-conquering ark, received as a reward for his valour a special inheritance, the land whereon his feet had trodden as an explorer. This property of Caleb's may have been the very same that Nabal inherited, for the Carmel where his possessions lay was not the famous promontory and mount jutting into the Mediterranean, but another place of the same name in the south of Judea.

There David and the band who had gathered round him had done Nabal great services. His shepherds reported, "The men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we any thing, as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the fields: they were a wall unto us both by night and day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep." David's men thought themselves justified in claiming a reward. "Thus shall ye say to him that liveth in prosperity (that enjoys life), Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast. Let the young men find favour in thine eyes. Give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David." They pleaded that they applied on a good day ("we come in a good day"), the time of sheep shearing, which is still a great season among persons whose wealth consists chiefly in sheep, as, *e.g.*, among Australian settlers, who, with their extensive sheep-runs, are great men like Nabal. But this Nabal rejects the petition, and in doing so speaks in a supercilious way, "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now-a-days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?" No doubt he knew well enough all about David, and therefore his way of speaking expressed not ignorance but con-

tempt. It was not the way that a patriotic and religious Israelite should have spoken of the great champion of his nation. Of course David's position as an exile, and the sort of people who had flocked to him in the cave of Adullam, gave just a handle for men to talk against him; but Nabal speaks as a man full of class prejudices, devoid of sympathy with persons in a different position from his own, ready to catch at any excuse which shall justify himself in his own eyes for refusing aid. He is thus an instance of inattention and ingratitude. Observe, too, he speaks selfishly; it is my bread, my water, my flesh. Now true charity does not so much call things its own as consider itself a steward for another. The man, in short, was churlish and evil in his doings. He was probably what his servants called him, a man of Belial, which is interpreted to mean a worthless, lawless fellow. And yet no doubt he deceived himself; he was quite ignorant of these faults, and one reason of his being ignorant was that he could not be spoken to—no man could speak to him. "He is such a son of Belial that a man cannot speak to him." Either he was so violent that people were afraid of him, or so obstinate and conceited that people found it no use to speak to him.

And the natural consequence of being above taking advice was, that he was in extremest danger without being aware of it; he was, as we say, within an ace of his life, without any one venturing to try to open his eyes to his peril.

His riches and high birth helped to hide the truth from him. Doubtless he had obsequious servants about him, who treated him with the utmost outward respect, while they voted him a son of Belial. He had an excellent wife, whose merits he did not know, and whose love he had forfeited. He was so utterly unprepared to hear the truth, that when he learns the danger he had been in, he is overwhelmed, his heart dies within him, and he becomes as a stone. This proud, selfish man was, in addition to his other vices, self-indulgent and intemperate; he indulged himself in a mode every way unbecoming, his expenses were disproportionate to his position. "He held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king." He enjoyed for the time a gross revelry. His "heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken." He had ten days given him to repent, then the Lord smote him that he died.

Now, there are many warnings for us in this history. There is a caution against inattention to appeals that are made to us. In the present day there are so many applications that many people put them at once into the waste-paper basket without looking at them; and still, as in Nabal's time, if people cast about for objections and excuses and reasons why they should not give, they may always find plenty ready to their hand. Still we are tempted to say my money, my house, my property; and to forget that we are only stewards, administering for another, not free to please ourselves. Still there is a danger of

being supercilious and speaking contemptuously of those who in fact are better than ourselves, but who lack some little worldly advantage in which we are tempted to pride ourselves. A little brief authority, social position, family pride, a larger income, may make men vaunt themselves almost as grossly and ridiculously as Nabal when he preferred himself to David.

Then we should learn a lesson that, when we are well off, and, as the world speaks, able to enjoy ourselves, then is the time for being considerate to others, lest the sight of our abundance tantalise and irritate them. It is not well when men spend much in extravagant and unsuitable indulgence, and ignore the condition of the Lazaruses at their gates.

Again, this history exhibits the degrading effect of self-indulgence, how it stupefies and brutalises a man. Let us beware of being so wrapped up in self as to become, like Nabal, ignorant of the obligations we are under to others, and so ungrateful. Ingratitude generally arises from a person being wrapped up in self, and unconscious of how much he is indebted to others.

But, besides these features in the character of Nabal, I wish to draw attention to a special point suggested by his case.

Are you such that you cannot be spoken to? It is ill when a man's best friends feel that they cannot remonstrate with him. How many might be saved from ruin if they would permit a friend to say a word in season to them! Sometimes a

young person is being drawn into dangerous society, is becoming intimate with a household where he will get no good, is drifting into familiarity which will permanently entangle him with an unsuitable consort, and yet no one feels authorised to interfere.

You notice a young man becoming inaccurate about truth, or extravagant in his habits, unpunctual at his office, and yet you feel he will not bear to be spoken to, you fear lest you should do more harm than good by interfering. Many a person is slipping into a bad way of using stimulants unadvisedly, whom no one dares caution against forming habits of intemperance. Many a girl is becoming gaudy and showy in her dress; she is wasting her money on finery, she is seen at hours and in places where she had better not be seen, and yet her nearest and dearest say she cannot bear to be spoken to. Alas! many have much to learn on the subject of taking advice. If we would encourage our truest friends to warn us in time, we must show ourselves meek, patient, receptive, gentle, thankful for a hint. They must feel sure that we will not bear a grudge against them for their candour, and store it up in our minds as a grievance, but put the best construction on what they say, give them credit for a good intention, and lay the point in prayer before God for His guidance.

How many persons would be the better for a friendly critic, for a person who would unite those two qualities, friendliness and criticism! Let us

remember that persons are ill judges in their own case. Medical men do not prescribe for themselves. If an ailment is at all serious, a physician will apply to some of his brethren in the faculty for advice. Notice that lookers-on see more of the game than the players. How clearly do we see matters in which our acquaintance are in error! They are, we will say, industrious and energetic, but there is a little infusion of vainglory and exaggerated sense of their own importance which we regret. Or they make a mistake in excessive outlay in a matter where simplicity would be much more becoming. Or the man is parading himself at meetings and public occasions, commemorations, festivals, anniversaries, speechmakings, always employed in the review of what others are accomplishing, and doing little himself. Or a man mismanages a son by over-anxiety, or distresses his wife by meddling in her department. Or he is overworking himself, giving his brain no rest. These are the kinds of faults which are palpable in our neighbours, and we feel it a pity that they do not encourage a real friend to open their eyes to the true state of the case by a little honest criticism.

But now it is probable that there is as great an error in our management of ourselves, and as visible to our well-wishers, if only they were encouraged to point it out. You who feel you could give very useful advice to a friend, if he were disposed to follow it, how is it with

yourself? Why, if a friend ventured to speak his mind to you, I know what would too probably happen. You would think you could not change now, or could not make so great a change. You would think that he had just mentioned the things that were fixed and unalterable, not in the reference. Or you would think, whatever you might say, that he overstated matters, was prejudiced and unfair to you, that he exaggerated, that he did not take into account certain considerations, and misunderstood. Perhaps you would reply, "That is your craze," "So you always say."

Let us pray against self-deception, lest that which is plain to others be hid from us, lest we be greedy, impatient, selfish, vainglorious, niggardly, indolent, without knowing it. Let us practise self-examination. Let us welcome censure, even from those who are not friendly, still more from real well-wishers, lest danger be near us, and we know it not. It was a bodily danger that was near Nabal, and he knew it not. May God open our eyes lest worse perils be near us; lest we be in danger of going out of the world self-deceivers, crying peace when there is no peace, with a drugged conscience, with faults uncorrected, all unprepared to stand before a holy God. Nabal was overwhelmed when he found how ignorant he had been, what a brute before God. His heart died within him. God grant that a still worse horror may not be ours, to find life with its opportunities closing on us, and the work undone

which time was given us for. If his heart sunk at having escaped a danger, how shall the heart die down at having incurred one, and such a danger too! Oh, may God save us, and all we love, from being such as cannot be spoken to!

As persons grow older there are fewer who feel at liberty to speak to them. While they were young, they were taken to account by parents, elders, schoolmasters, and employers. There is a peril in age, honour, position—this peril, that they lift men up above remonstrance. All the more need, therefore, is there for the office of the clergy, for self-examination, for bringing ourselves to the test of God's Word, for the discipline of Lent, for everything humbling and searching, that faults may be discerned while there is time to correct them, and the soul go not to her account before her Judge—ignorant, self-deceiving, and so unhealed.

God grant us grace to bear to be spoken to!

XV.

THE WELL OF BETHLEHEM.

“And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink
of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate !”
—2 SAM. xxiii. 15.

WE are to-day parting with the history of King David ; the Old Testament lessons give us his last words. He took his farewell of his people and family in several forms and on different occasions. In the beginning of the chapter from which the text is taken, we read, “Now these be the last words of David,” and then follows a short poem. The seventy-second Psalm has appended to it in the Bible version these words, “The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended.” In 1 Kings ii. we read, “Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die ; and he charged Solomon his son, saying, I go the way of all the earth : be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man ; and keep the charge of the Lord thy God.” Again, in that portion of the book of Chronicles which we have had read to us last Sunday and to-day, we are told how David assembled all the

princes of Israel, exerted himself to rise from his bed, stood up on his feet, and having recounted God's mercies to himself, proceeded, "And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek Him, He will be found of thee; but, if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever."

But the incident to which I invite your attention to-day does not belong to the latter days of David, but to his early life, before his reign of forty years began. "And three of the thirty chief went down, and came to David in the harvest time unto the cave of Adullam: and the troop of the Philistines pitched in the valley of Rephaim. And David was then in an hold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem. And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate! And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord. And he said, Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? therefore he would not drink it." This incident belongs to the time when David, as an outlaw, had sought for shelter

in the cave of Adullam. Though most devoted to his country, most loyal to Saul, both as his king and father-in-law, he was yet proscribed by the jealous, frantic tyrant. Men flocked to him from various motives, some fleeing from their creditors, some in distress, some turbulent souls that love adventure, men who do not easily settle down, who are too proud, original, and independent to succeed in this life; some perhaps because, being of David's own family, they were persecuted by Saul; and some perhaps from the highest and purest motives, attracted by the nobleness of the character of this champion of his country. "David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam: and when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him. And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men." Never was a band of men who were of such doubtful antecedents kept in such good order, as these were by David, who was already anointed by Samuel, the destined king, the sweet psalmist of Israel. While they were with Nabal's flocks, his shepherds testified, "The men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we any thing, as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the fields: they were a wall unto us both by night and day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep."

David had long been hunted by Saul, like a partridge in the mountains, but now another danger oppressed the land : the Philistines had invaded the country, David was in some mountain fortress—"an hold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem." It was harvest time, and the country was being ravaged by the uncircumcised, and the crops carried off before his eyes. He felt himself powerless, and perhaps, in a moment of exhaustion, depressed in body and mind, chafing at his inaction, and yet not knowing how to strike a blow for Israel, the scenes of childhood recurred to his mind, an unaccountable longing took possession of him, and the words escaped him, which he probably regretted as soon as he had uttered them, "Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" He thought of his happy childhood before he knew the cares of greatness, he thought of the kind greetings at the gate as he came home from tending his father's sheep. No water had ever tasted like that water, and, thirsty and hot, weary with the day's anxiety, as evening fell he was reminded of these eventides in days of old, and the irrepressible longing found vent in hasty words, "Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!"

It marks how he was adored by his followers, that three of the chief of them at once started off, made the bold venture, risked their lives, brake through the host of the Philistines, drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that was by

the gate, and took it and brought it to David. His conduct, when they returned from their perilous enterprise, at first strikes us as strange. Courtesy, one should have thought, would have obliged him to avail himself of the refreshing boon, which, at such risk, these gallant followers had provided for him. But the more he valued it, and the more he valued them, the less was he inclined to take to himself any personal benefit out of their venture. The deed was too noble to bear fruit merely in giving him a temporary gratification. He would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord; and he said, "Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this; is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? Therefore he would not drink it." He felt too much love for his followers; it gave him a turn, a shock, to think what perils they had encountered; he felt that, if he drank, he should be drinking more than water, even blood, and his thirst was gone, abolished by his admiration for his friends, and his horror at their perils. He poured the precious draught out unto the *Lord*, implying that God would accept it, that it was too noble an offering for man to take to himself, that such self-sacrifice was worthy of being consecrated to something better than man's use, and therefore he handed it over to God.

Very romantic, very anti-utilitarian, such conduct! It might be urged, what good could be done by pouring on the ground the precious

draught? was it not to waste it, was it not to throw away that which it had cost so much to procure? But he put sentiment above utility. *They* had been self-sacrificing, and he would be self-denying too. It is the property of one golden deed to elicit others. The incident gives us an insight into the qualities by which David had won the affection and confidence of his followers. He must have been no common leader, for rough, wild men to imperil themselves to gratify his least wish, and this not, mark you, when he was prosperous and reigning, but when he was an outlaw and a fugitive. His conduct shows that he was worthy of such followers; he met affection with affection, generosity with generosity. I said his conduct was the reverse of utilitarian, quite disinterested; but probably few things more paved his way to greatness than this action of his, though he meant it not so. It secured him the support of his followers first, and, through them, of Judah and Israel. What was at first only the gratification of fine feeling and sentiment was as influential as if it had been the result of policy.

Nor did this little incident bear fruit merely in that day, but, from being immortalised in Holy Scripture, it has lived on through all time, encouraging heroic efforts and gallant enterprises on the one hand, and consideration for followers and subordinates on the other. Like some other passages in Holy Scripture, it breathes the spirit which in later times was called chivalrous, and

which the influence of the Gospel will propagate till the end of time. Indeed, we may also think that this incident has been allowed a place in the Holy Bible, the book designed for man's culture, for other reasons. Men have seen in David, in the cave of Adullam, a shadow of David's Son; receiving those whom man rejects, affording a refuge to the distressed, to the bitter in spirit, to those who have failed in life, to the restless and discontented, making new and happy men of them by His guidance, and ever preparing them for fresh and more glorious conquests.

And if David at other times suggests thoughts of Christ, much more may he be expected to do so in his noblest and most generous actions. If he is, in the incident we have been considering to-day, the pattern of a leader, forgetful of self, taking a vivid interest in the lives of his followers, exciting enthusiasm, and proving himself worthy of the feelings excited, should not this remind us of Him who is the perfect Head, the Captain of our salvation, the Leader and Commander of the people? Should not He be followed with more enthusiasm on our part, more readiness to attend to His wishes, more zeal to make sacrifices and run ventures for His sake? Has He no longings which we may gratify? Though seated in glory, though surrounded by angels and archangels, He still cries, "I thirst," "Give Me to drink;" He desires the conversion of souls, the growth of souls, the completion of the number of the elect, the bringing into the fold of the Jew and the hea-

then. He has tender recollections connected with His life on earth; when He too, like David, was a Jewish youth, when He drank of the water of the well of Nazareth, when He sat at mid-day by the well of Sychar. He still appreciates every gallant venture made on His behalf, whenever men go, in jeopardy of their lives, to gratify His longings for the good of souls. Let us believe that we can as really afford Him pleasure, as if we saw Him present, and heard Him express His desires.

There are many at this moment imitating those brave heroes who brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem to gratify their chief. Those are doing so who have torn themselves away from England and their homes, and are enduring inconvenience in distasteful scenes and dangerous climates, for the conversion of the heathen. Those are doing so who, in our own land, are toiling amid a semi-heathen population in dreary suburbs and squalid alleys. Those, too, who are nursing in our hospitals and workhouses, for love of Christ and His poor; well-born women overcoming their repugnance to disgusting details, exposing themselves to infection, steeling their nerves, submitting to misconstruction, while labouring to reform the abuses connected with great public establishments. All these are recreating the Saviour, gratifying His longings, as truly as those mighty men of old refreshed the literal David.

Yes, dear brethren and sisters, when you are stirred by any appeal made to you, when a Sunday-school wants teachers, when some sick need nursing, when the claims of the heathen abroad or the semi-heathen at home are pressed on you, think that you hear Him saying, "Oh that one would give Me drink!" He asks nothing from us, of which He has not set the example Himself. He has brought us that to drink which He procured at more than the jeopardy, even at the sacrifice, of His own life. He brake through a worse host than that of Philistines to bring us a draught of the water of the well of life which is by the gate of heaven. When it is offered to our lips we may well say, Is not this the blood of Him that went in jeopardy of His life? So may we say, but not refuse to drink on that account, for His blood is drink indeed. He that believeth on Him shall never thirst. The water that He gives shall be in us a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

XVI.

UNANIMITY.

“He is the God that maketh men to be of one mind in an house.”

—PSALM lxxviii. 6 (*Prayer-book Version*).

IT is said that these words in our Prayer-book version do not accurately represent the Hebrew original. Our Bible version is, “God setteth the solitary in families,” the margin suggesting, instead of the words “in families,” “in a house” or home, *i.e.*, as Dr. Kay explains, those who had been lonely outcasts God brings to a home of His own providing, and settles them there as His guests.

But, whether this particular passage expresses the truth or not, a truth it certainly is that our good Lord God does delight in the inhabitants of a house being of one mind, and that He alone can bring about this happy result.

If it be said that this passage of Holy Scripture does not enforce unity, there are many others which do. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that

ran down unto the beard, even unto Aaron's beard, and went down to the skirts of his clothing." "The high priest, who was himself a bond of unity, supplied also a type and picture of it."¹ Jerusalem is described as a city that is at unity in itself. "As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, . . . that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another." There is much in this Epistle to the Corinthians against splits, divisions, and schisms.

Let us to-day consider unanimity as desirable in three different spheres—the family, the parish, and the Church generally.

First, then, taking it literally, the Almighty "maketh men to be of one mind in an house." Reflect how good and beautiful it is when this is the case. When husband and wife are of one mind, then they support each other, they supplement each other, they improve each other, besides enjoying the friendship and affection of each other. They have come to an understanding as to the different departments and provinces to be assigned to each, they defer to each other in their several lines, they see each other's merits and excellences, make allowance for each other's weaknesses and peculiarities, they are agreed as to how their household is to be regulated, how their children

¹ Dr. Kay on Psalm cxxxiii.

are to be educated, how their servants are to be treated, they are of one mind on religious topics, and the consequence of this unanimity is, that their joys are doubled and their sorrows halved. If the man is in anxiety about his professional prospects, his investments or his losses, he does not shut up his troubles in his own bosom, but imparts them to his wife, and is relieved by her sympathy, or aided by her judgment. He is helped to do right by her more sensitive conscience, he is assisted by having to state things to an unprofessional judge, and sees things the clearer for having to strip them of technicalities, and present them to a simpler unsophisticated mind. They two are of one mind, and therefore they can pray together over any difficult matter. (See 1 Peter iii. 7.)

In the same way it is a beautiful thing when God has made parents and children to be of one mind in a house; when the parents command the reverence and affection of all their children, when the children are satisfied that all is done for them wisely, liberally, and impartially. When this is the case, the same spirit animates the household, and they concur in the style of living, in the intimacies they cultivate, in the place of worship they attend, in the charities they dispense. Of course, where there is intelligence there will be variety, and the most affectionate man and wife cannot have exactly the same tastes and faculties; the most dutiful children will develop powers which will distinguish

them from their parents ; but each may rejoice in the other's gifts, each may try to find employment for the other's specialities ; amidst variety there may be substantial unity, as they rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep, and bear each other's burdens. Whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it, or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

Again, it is a beautiful thing when God makes men to be of one mind in a house in the relationship of employers and servants, when the master and mistress treat servants as members of the family, interest themselves in their welfare, show real kindness—not merely getting work out of servants, or using them as instruments to make life comfortable, but when they love and seek to be loved. In such a household the children have real and wise friends in the servants, who do them good, not harm ; the servants are improved by contact with the refinements of those over them ; when sickness comes the household help each other, the mistress will tend the servants as well as the servants their employers ; and on each side it will be Christian love, not mere self-interest, which is the spring of action.

So much for the beauty of family unity. Now consider for a moment the opposite side of the picture—the misery of those families where there is not unity. When husband and wife clash, they can inflict on each other much deeper

wounds than any stranger could deal. The withholding of love, of confidence, is felt as a wrong ; the mind dwells on the grievance ; faults on one side lead to faults on the other ; they retire into themselves ; they get to have separate friends, pursuits, interests ; they speak disrespectfully of each other, they irritate and exasperate each other. It is not like other quarrels. In other cases, if persons do not get on well together, they can keep apart, and have little to do with each other ; but husband and wife must necessarily have numberless occasions continually turning up when, if there is not love, there is danger of there being at last hatred. What an atmosphere must such a house be for children to grow up in ! What can there be for them to reverence ? And it is ill to grow up without any objects of reverence. How likely that divisions should spread—one child side with one parent, and another with another !

Or, again, when parents and children pull opposite ways, how wretched ! The parents miss the affection which they think due to them ; and the children are discontented, dissatisfied with the environment in which they find themselves. There is constraint where there ought to be frankness, suspicion where there ought to be confidence. Instead of happy memories, and the feeling that there is love all round you, there is weariness, disgust, alienation, a desire to break loose and fly away ; a sordid consideration of money, property, or the expectation of it, being

the only remaining bond of union, when the ties of affection have been snapped.

Thus have I reminded you of these two pictures, the united home on the one hand, and on the other the household (not worthy of the name of home), where unsubdued temper, a selfish spirit, or excess of any kind, has dried up the natural springs of happiness, and left hearts sore, tempers fretted by misunderstandings, disappointment, recrimination, the prolific brood of disorder and violation of God's law of love. But now reflect that it is not only that *man* is made wretched and human society injured by disunion, but that our good Father in heaven is grieved and disappointed when His children defeat His purposes, and go contrary to His intentions. He intended earth to be a copy of heaven, human relationships to be modelled on Divine types. The love of father and child was to be a shadow of the eternal and mysterious relationship between the Almighty Father and His co-eternal Son. The union of husband and wife was to represent the mystical union between Christ and His Church. The arrangement of helpers and servants on earth was to represent the order and harmony of the heavenly household, where angels, ministers, and spirits are ready to speed on the errands of their King.

Few things, we may believe, more delight the eyes of our heavenly Father than a happy marriage union, or a dutiful circle of children gathered round worthy parents, or the sight of servants

passing into friends, as they render loving service and are appreciated. But I wish to affirm not only that God loveth men to be of one mind in a house, but that He maketh them to be so, *i.e.*, that He alone makes them ; that, if we value the result, we must apply to Him who alone can produce it. We must not try to unite men on other than Christian principles, we must not think courtesy, politeness, good sense, self-interest, refinement, gentlemanly feeling, or aught else, sufficient to produce what we want to see accomplished, unless prayer on one side, and God's grace on the other, are at work. Husband and wife may at the beginning be united by passion, but grace is what we are to trust to, to make them really united, when ill health comes, or reverses, or loss of beauty. Parents may idolise their children, and have the tenderest natural affections, but it is religion which must plant the principles which alone can make the parents wise and the children obedient. So no servants can expect a really comfortable employment where the heads of the household are not religious ; and no employers can be sure of attached and high-minded servants, unless Christian principle is at the bottom of the domestics' integrity.

But when we remember how much God loves the result, what pleasure it gives Him, how surely it is according to His mind and intention, then we are more encouraged to pray for it, and incited to do our best, sure that He will second our efforts. Such good things as we

have been speaking of, do not come by chance, or by leaving things alone. They require thought, care, study, painstaking. The husband and wife who would be a pattern couple, must be frequent in confessing failures, in humbling themselves for faults; they must grow in grace, and imbibe more and more of the Spirit of Christ. The parents and children who would constitute a blessed circle, mutually helpful, must be dwelt in by that Spirit, whose fruit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. The establishment which is to be a pattern one of master and servants, must not be content with fulfilling the letter of a contract—"so much wages, so much work"—but by Christian love must serve one another.

But I said, at the beginning, that I would not confine the application of the words of the text to the household: let us enlarge their scope, and see how they bear on the parish and the Church generally.

How must our good God love to see a parish, a congregation, united, every one finding something to do, doing it to the glory of God, not for his own credit; each one recognising his neighbour's merits, in honour preferring one another, each esteeming other better than himself; each one ready to be employed where he is most wanted, not having his pet scheme, and saying, "I must go my own way, I cannot take interest in what I have not originated," but each showing a spirit of subordination, a love of genuine work,

not of show or pretence ! How well it would be, if our parishes were so organised that the clergyman should have his proper work to do, and no more ; that the laity should feel they were recognised and utilised, and had their proper influence ; the poor cared for without being pauperised ; each one's gift for music, teaching, or nursing brought out and used for the common good ; no rivalry, no indolence, no hiding the talent ; all busy like a hive of bees, no drones. Surely a well-appointed church, every part cared for by loving service ; a well-organised parish, all its institutions managed by willing church-workers—this is a beautiful sight, which recreates the eyes of God.

And, on the other hand, how must He be displeased when there are misunderstandings and divisions in a parish ; when the clergyman is on bad terms with his people ; when the congregation is divided into factions, one wanting a change in one direction, another in another ; when choirs fall out and threaten to resign ; when institutions languish ; when schools have to be closed ; when the sick are untended. O dear brethren, let us pray God to avert all such evils from ourselves. We read in the Book of Judges of God sending an evil spirit, a spirit of division, between Abimelech and the men of Shechem. May He send among us a spirit of mutual forbearance, of willingness to be employed as is most good for others, not most agreeable to ourselves. God maketh men to be of one mind in a house, He, and He only. Let us

seek Him to bless our parochial arrangements, to strengthen what is weak, supply what is wanting, correct what is amiss, and send good men among us.

Lastly, let us consider how the words of the text apply to a still wider circle than the parish, viz., to the Church of our land—the Church of England generally. I might extend the thought to the whole Church universal, and bid you pray that east and west, Greek and Roman, Churchmen and Dissenters, were all restored to unity ; but I will confine my remarks to the Church of England.

Surely it would delight the Lord our gracious God to see us of one mind. We cannot, indeed, expect, we can hardly desire, absolute identity of opinions. Some will see one side of truth, some another ; some will value one element of religion more than another. There are various gifts, and intense men are often narrow. They are full of one idea, one discovery, one specific, one remedy. But all this might go on, and yet we might satisfy the text, and be of one mind in our spiritual home. If we were full of love to Christ, were led by the Spirit, were full of reverence for Holy Scripture ; were very humble, very devout, very industrious, very respectful to those set over us, very conscious of our own infirmities, then there might still be room for different schools of thought, for ceremonial somewhat differing ; different styles of preaching, different taste in music ; some choosing foreign work, some home ; some learned, some unapt for scholarship ;—but there would

be one mind, the mind of the Spirit, the mind of Christ.

Do what you can, dear brethren, to produce this happy result, by humility, by respect to those in authority, by working rather than by criticising. Call upon Him who delights to make men of one mind in a house, who alone can make men of one mind in a house, to heal divisions and promote unity in this Church of ours.

XVII.

*THE INTENSITY OF THE DIVINE
NATURE.*

“The Lord is not slack.”—2 PET. iii. 9.

ONE of the most fruitful causes of evil is the notion in most men's minds, only half-formed and unavowed, that there is a kind of slackness in God's government, that our actions are not made much account of. Men have languid ideas on the subject, the opposite to vivid, and they come to attribute a certain languor and indifference to God. It is true that careless persons think very little about God at all. They rather try to keep the subject out of their thoughts. But when the matter is brought before them, when they must think about it, they take refuge in some such imagination as that, after all, God will not be so strict as He is represented to be, that little is known or can be known of the hereafter. They feel that multitudes are in the same situation as themselves, they shall be no worse off than numberless others. In short, they think little about God, and so they imagine that God thinks little about them.

I fear that not only those who may be termed ungodly feel thus, but that, with many others, there is no just sense of the intensity of God's nature, by reason of which it is impossible that His government should be other than perfect. His being is such that He cannot deal slackly with any. The Divine attention is, so to say, concentrated on each. We are each as much to Him as if there were no other being in the world besides ourselves. Such is God's nature. Man's nature is different. If we have a multiplicity of subjects to attend to, we cannot give as much time to each as if there were a smaller number. If there are a multitude of persons who have claims on us, we must do the best we can, not what we should desire to do. But with God it is different. He is infinite. No multiplicity inconveniences Him. Ten thousand are no more than one. He has power and insight sufficient to deal with each. He has unbounded interest in each, infinite love for each.

These are general statements ; let us break them up, take them in detail, that we may realise them and impress them upon ourselves.

Think of the immeasurableness of God's power with regard to each separate soul and body. Here, in this world, what pains may not man suffer ! how many nerves may be tortured ! Think how minutely elaborate the organisation of each part of the body is, and how intense the pain which may affect each part. The eye, the ear, the heart, the skin, every member, every joint, every muscle is in His power. And the

mind, cannot He affect that too? He may cause the mind to be at ease, reposeful, contented, cheerful, thankful, calmly poised, without anxiety as to the future, full of innocent enjoyment, glowing with benevolence, responding to the beauty of nature, conformed to God's own mind; or He may withdraw the influences of His gracious Spirit, and leave a man to himself, and the man may become moody, sullen, discontented, cross-grained, quarrelsome, his own self-tormentor, restless, remorseful, gloomy.

Think again of the thoroughness of God's knowledge of us. The acutest judges of character are often at fault, the singularities of character baffle them. We are constantly misjudging each other. We know a man at one period of his life, not at another. We see him in public, not in his family. We know nothing of a thousand secret passages of his life, bearing on his moral habits, his devotional exercises or neglect of them, and so our estimate is a very imperfect one. We do not fully know the nature of his temptations; but the Omniscient has scanned him from his infancy, has understood all his motives, has never forgotten one circumstance, has justly estimated every conflicting influence that has told on him, and understands him thoroughly; measures his moral worth or rottenness, his strength or weakness, his selfishness or love of others.

Think again of the intensity of the holiness of the Lord God with Whom we have to do. He has no imperfections. His justice is not too

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severe. His love is never weakly indulgent. His is the holiness which necessarily hates evil. Sin is abhorrent to His nature; it is painful, offensive, revolting to him. Somewhat as a perfect ear is pained by discord, only infinitely more, somewhat as we shrink from intense hideous ugliness, so He cannot endure evil. The holiness of God is so consummate that towards each being ever created it has glowed with the intensest desire to make that being holy and happy, like God Himself. There has been no neglect, no forgetfulness, no excess; there has been a plan for each, a beauty for each, a work for each, assistance for each, a reward for each. And yet though each created being might make spiritual progress for ages of ages, He, the only one, would remain infinitely removed from any of His creatures, intense in goodness, goodness manifested by its repulsion to evil, as well as its delight in truth, virtue, and benevolence.

Again, as to the love which God bears His creatures. Human affections give us some faint notion of the intensity of God's love. How peculiar a mother's affection for her sucking child! how fond a father's interest in an attached daughter or dutiful son, when perhaps every other pleasure has faded away, and the parent has no other topic of consolation but the merits of a darling child! But is this intense affection anything more than a faint reflection of the loving interest which the Almighty Parent takes in His offspring? "The very hairs of your head are all

numbered," said our Saviour. "I have graven thee on the palms of my hands," is His word to His Church. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." God only knows the love of God.

Surely, dear brethren, you will admit that the view which I have tried to set forth, of the intense interest which God takes in us, is one which too often drops out of sight. We do not indeed controvert it, but it too little influences us. Partly this is the case because sin has found its way into all of us; and wherever sin is, it makes men shrink from God, try to forget Him, keep as much away from Him as they can; and partly also we live under a system in which God, for our probation, withdraws Himself from observation. He does not force Himself on our notice. He leaves men in great measure to themselves. It is wonderful how possible it is to ignore Him.

Physicians may treat the human body independent of Him. Indeed they are greatly tempted to do so. When their remedies succeed, they say of a patient, "I have carried him through." When their remedies fail, they say, "The machine was worn out, I was called in too late." We may ignore God in past history. We may read the records of human discovery, and praise this philosopher's insight, that inventor's fertility, this navigator's boldness, that mathematician's industry, and not see the hand of God opening continents, diffusing knowledge, providing for increasing millions, affording facilities for the diffu-

sion of His truth. We may ignore God in present events; we may be absorbed in watching the little actors on the scene, and forget the great Cause of all. We may think of this general's skilfulness, that politician's unscrupulousness, the genius of one people, the habits of another, as if these things accounted for all; as if, all the time, God were not moving in a mysterious way, working out His great designs, causing sin to bring its own punishment; as if He were not fighting the battles of the weak, putting down oppressors from their seat, and raising them of low degree. We may forget God in private life, as if He were not continually tracking out crime, making men taste of the fruit of their sin, causing the kindness and generosity of one man to come round to him, and the selfishness of another to land him in isolation.

Yes, let us remind ourselves how oppositely men behave in the great trial which is constituted by our God not obtruding Himself on our view, but hiding Himself. "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself." "Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him: on the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him: He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him. But He knoweth the way that I take; when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Some have in consequence lapsed into a spirit of independence and forgetfulness of God: "They have no fear of God before their eyes. God is not in all their thoughts."

And short of this, there is practical atheism ; men going on much as they would go on if there were no God, not referring to Him, not depending on Him, not sending up to Him any acknowledgment, any of that grateful interchange of affection which a parent has a right to expect from a child. "Our tongues are our own," say some. "We are they that ought to speak. Who is Lord over us?" How different have been the feelings of God's saints ! How have they delighted to recognise God as their Creator ! "Thou hast fashioned me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me. My reins are Thine, Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb." "I will give thanks unto Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect ; and in Thy book were all my members written, which day by day were fashioned when as yet there was none of them." Job x. 8 : "Thine hands have made me, and fashioned me together round about. . . . Remember, I beseech Thee, that Thou hast made me as the clay. . . . Hast Thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese ? Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews. Thou hast granted me life and favour, and Thy visitation hath preserved my spirit. . . . If I sin, then Thou markest me, and Thou wilt not acquit me from mine iniquity."

How grand in this way is the 19th Psalm ! In it there are two great subjects touched upon, by the side of which man might almost be tempted

to think himself insignificant. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork." Then God's revelation is dwelt upon—the law of the Lord, which has a message for all men as truly as the material heavens. But these vast subjects—the material universe on the one hand, God's revelation on the other—do not hinder the Psalmist's sense of his own personal relations to God. "Who can tell how oft he offendeth?" "Cleanse Thou me from secret faults. Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins." "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Thy sight." And so again and again. "Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of Thy wings."

Yes, let us believe that nothing is too small to bring before Him, that everything which interests us will interest Him. Let us never admit the idea, This is important to me, but to no one else. He that despiseth little things, shall fall by little and little. Trifles make the sum of human things. Nothing is small which shows character, which bears on character. How constantly do we find in the case of others that small things are scrutinised? A trial takes place, and all the little details of family life have to be gone into. A king dies, and a century after every little article of scandal is raked up. A man dies, and his most private journals and correspondence are scanned. You may say only criminals, public men, great men, poets and authors, undergo this scrutiny. True, only such undergo it at present

in the eyes of men, in the newspapers and books of the day, but there is One who knows all thy secrets; little as you are, insignificant as you think you are, He is not indifferent to thee. He made thee, He desires thy happiness, and still more thy goodness; He knows what may mar thy happiness, what may be the making of thy character, and He is watching over thee. He is pleading with thee. He will not easily give thee up. He is ready to apply affliction if need be. He has painful processes, and sometimes He applies them to those who seem most advanced in holiness, most refined, most purified. We are poor judges of His dealings, only we know they are dictated by intense love, and directed by perfect wisdom. Only, and this is my point to-day, do not think that what you do, and what you are, does not much signify. It signifies greatly to yourself, to others, to God. You are of more consequence than you think. We ourselves can understand how small actions, little noticed now, tend to form habits, and at a critical moment that which has become habitual may prove very important. A man fails at a crisis, or rises on the occasion of some great demand on him, according to petty indulgences or small victories, which none but God is privy to. Oh, may He teach us more of the intensity of His love to us, of the closeness of His scrutiny, the thoroughness of His knowledge, the perfection of His holiness, and the nearness of His assistance when we call for it!

XVIII.

*CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FIRST
DISCIPLES.*

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

—ROMANS viii. 35.

ON the first Sunday in the month more persons are in the habit of communicating than on other Sundays ; let us then now recur to the night of our Lord’s institution of the Eucharist. Carry your thoughts to that upper chamber where our Lord poured forth the treasures of His love on His disciples the last day of His life. We believe that what took place there affected not only the party then gathered together, but had a bearing on disciples in all after-ages, and so on ourselves ; *e.g.*, it is very plain that our Lord in the high priestly prayer which He offered, took in more than His eleven apostles, for He said in so many words, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.”

In the same way, when He laid aside His garments and washed His disciples’ feet that night, it was not only to teach them a lesson, but the

symbolical action had a meaning for us. It was to represent the infinite descent which, as Son of God, He had made, in divesting Himself of the glories of Godhead, and taking on Him the form of a servant. It was to teach us to imitate His example by doing the humblest services to each other. It was also to signify that, before coming to Holy Communion, we need washing, *i.e.*, cleansing from sin, and that He alone can cleanse us. "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." In fact, all that took place that night in the upper chamber was normal, a pattern to all time. When our Lord said that one should betray Him, His words induced self-examination. Each faithful disciple threw open his breast, as it were, for examination, saying, "Lord, is it I?" So should we submit ourselves to our Lord's inspection, lay bare all our breasts to Him, and ask Him to help us to cast out all that is displeasing to Him, lest we, like Judas, betray His cause.

When we are perplexed with the difficulty of understanding the nature of the sacrament, and fear lest we err on one side or the other, it is a comfort to silence controversy, and escape from over-defining, by falling back on the thought that He still does for us what He did for them who were gathered together on that Maundy evening; that He still gives to us what He gave to them, that, whatever He meant when He said, "Take, eat, this is My body," "Drink ye all of it, for this is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"—whatever, I

say, He conveyed to the disciples then, He is ready to convey to all faithful communicants now. Such benefits I take to be participation in Himself, increased union with Himself, nourishment of our spiritual life, leavening our whole humanity (body, soul, and spirit) with everlasting vitality. He purifies, strengthens, assimilates, conforms. He ennobles, cheers, cleanses, unites to Himself and all His saints.

But I do not propose this morning so much to dwell on the benefits derived from worthy partaking, as to ask you to consider, historically, what were the actual results, in the apostles, of His training and His gifts, and among other gifts, of that great gift which He reserved for the last evening of His life, when, as though to console them for His approaching disappearance from their sight, He ordained this sacrament, as the means by which He would be present with them, unseen, even to the end.

I would like to call your attention to four points in the disciples' characters, which I attribute to our Lord's action upon them—all of which features of character, I believe, He would like to see reproduced in us; and all of which the grace conveyed in Holy Communion is producing in multitudes of good Christians, and therefore should produce in us.

1. Notice the strong personal attachment to the Saviour which marked the apostles. "My Lord and my God," exclaims St. Thomas. Peter, when he finds it is the Lord, forgets the fish and

casts himself into the sea to speed to his Master. When probed by the question, "Lovest thou Me?" he replies, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee." St. John declares, "We love Him, because He first loved us" (1 John iv. 19). This not only characterised the original eleven apostles, but we know it has been true of Christians in all ages since. Stephen exclaims, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." St. Paul exclaims, "To me to live is Christ;" "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me;" "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

2. Another point which I wish noticed in the apostles and early Christians, is their martyr spirit. When our Lord signifies to St. Peter that He will be called to crucifixion, then St. John, unbidden, springs forth, and signifies his readiness to follow. "Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following." St. Paul says, "Neither count I my life dear to myself, so that I might finish my course with joy." He could say, "I die daily." His was a daily martyrdom, as he endured the hatred of those countrymen whom he so dearly loved.

We have only to read Church history to find how bravely the early Christians endured tortures, submitted to be exposed to wild beasts, and faced death in frightful forms. So zealous were they that they had often to be even repressed by their leaders from courting prosecution. The tempta-

tion to apostatise was presented to them in the most insinuating form. Heathen parents would plead with their children not to bring them to shame and pierce their hearts. The feelings of weak women and mothers were worked upon, the compliances required were reduced to a minimum, represented as a mere form, such as, just throwing a few grains of incense on an altar on an emperor's birthday. But the great majority stood steadfast, the sufferings of the martyrs did not deter others, rather it passed into a proverb that their blood was the seed of the Church, *i.e.*, was, like seed sown, not wasted when it ran into the ground, but produced a crop of converts and imitators. No one can doubt the martyr spirit of the apostles and primitive believers.

3. I would draw attention to another exhibition of their zeal—viz., their desire to make converts, to draw others in—their evangelising spirit. They were not content with possessing the truth themselves, but they burned to impart it to others. "Woe is unto me," says St. Paul, "if I preach not the Gospel," if I do not evangelise. Just as the persons cured by our Lord, could not help proclaiming His miraculous works, so persons, who felt themselves transformed by the grace of the Gospel, could not help entreating others to come and taste the advantages which they had found so beneficial to themselves. Aquila and Priscilla and many another laboured like St. Paul. Slaves converted slaves, soldiers influenced soldiers, wives won their husbands, children won their parents.

The mustard seed grew, the leaven spread, owing to the enthusiasm of the early Christians, to their attaining the mind of Christ, yearning over the ignorant as He did, praying for labourers to be sent into the harvest, and each one hearing the voice addressing him personally, "Son, go work to-day in My vineyard."

4. Lastly, I notice, in the early disciples, a forgetfulness of self. They are so on fire with zeal, so intense in their love of Christ, that self is very much put out of sight. This is very noticeable in the four evangelists. How little do they bring themselves forward! They scarcely reveal who it is that writes the account, or when, under what circumstances, it is composed; they are engrossed in their great subject. St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. John, give no indication of who the writer is of their Gospels. St. Luke, indeed, implies who he is, but does not introduce his name, the reference to himself is only in the preface or dedication, after that he disappears from view; and, I think, this has been characteristic of true Christians since. The greatest and best have not put themselves forward. How many anonymous givers have there been, how many unknown authors of prayers, hymns, books; how many silent unknown workers, content to be forgotten, to be eclipsed, if only Christ be honoured, and the work of God advanced!

I trust I have carried you with me, brethren, in pointing out these qualities as characteristic of the apostles and primitive Christians; let us now

remind ourselves that they ought to distinguish us also, that we, in our day, should present the same general features. We must seek God's grace, specially in Holy Communion, to produce the same beautiful results in ourselves.

1. Personal love to the Saviour. God grant that this may be shed abroad in our hearts. It will lead to all other graces. When we can reply, as St. Peter did, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee," then all will be well. In order to generate this love of the Saviour, dwell in thought on the position in which we stand. The Almighty, whose power reaches to those stars whose light is so distant that, though travelling incredibly fast, it has never yet reached this earth; He who knows the disposition of every particle in this globe and in myriads of other worlds—this infinite Lord God has come nigh to us in the person of His Son. The Son of God, without ceasing to be infinite, has become man, has invested Himself with man's nature, man's feelings, will, and memory. God the Son has lived and suffered, and spoken and acted, on this earth of ours, so that we may know Him. Though out of sight, He is not far from any one of us; He asks our confidence, He reveals to us how He has loved us and given Himself for us, how He is the friend of the better self in each of us. He is ready to help us to be good, and wise, and brave, ready to put us in the way of recovering true freedom, of mounting up to know God, and to become like God.

Dear brethren, it is love that quickens love. God grant us to know the love which Christ feels for us, to understand how anxious He is to win the confidence of each one here present, and to make us all that we ought to be, all that we were meant to be. May God create in us, by His Holy Spirit, this personal love of the Saviour!

2. We noticed the martyr spirit of the holy men of old. We must not think that the time has gone by for exhibiting something of the same spirit. As far as society is still imperfectly Christianised, as long as sin abounds, Christians will have to make sacrifices for their religion. I doubt not that every day there are persons who are foregoing pecuniary advantages for conscience' sake, they renounce opportunities of making money by means which they think unjustifiable, they refuse to follow a multitude to do evil, they stand out and submit to be singular, they make enemies by their strictness. Ah, in many other ways there are good Christians exhibiting the martyr spirit, such as the missionary who encounters a pestilential climate, nay, the medical man at home who risks his life in discharge of his duty, the nurse who sacrifices herself in devotion to the sick, the soldier who lays down his life for his country. All of these, who are induced to make sacrifices by Christian motives, have something of the martyr spirit. Be ready, dear brethren, to make such sacrifices should God call you to do so. Ask Him to enable you to endure hardness, to give you a right judgment that you may not

throw away prudence, and run unnecessary risks on the one hand, nor, on the other, save life so as really to lose it, *i.e.*, be so careful of your own ease and comfort as to decline the call, when you are invited to self-sacrifice.

3. We noticed that the apostles and early Christians were full of an evangelising spirit. Let this be a lesson to any who think that as long as they are religious in their own hearts in private, they may retire into themselves, and do nothing to spread religion among others. This is lukewarmness, not zeal. We want a baptism of fire, our light should shine before men. We ought to compel others to come in. We ought to ask, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" We ought to cry, "Here am I, send me." Is there not work all round us? drunkards to be reclaimed, children to be taught in Sunday schools, institutions to be kept up? God grant us to say, "I have learnt, and I must teach. I have received, and I must convey to others. I have found, and I must guide others to find. The Lord Jesus trusts me, and I must not disappoint Him, must not fail Him; He trusts me to continue His work, and try to lead others to know and love Him."

4. Lastly, we noticed that the early disciples, and eminently the evangelists, forgot themselves, sank self, were content to be unknown and overlooked, so that God was glorified. When our self-love is wounded, when we think we are not made enough of, not treated with proper con-

sideration, let it be a sign to us that we have not enough zeal. If zeal were burning in us, we should forget self, we should be otherwise occupied, we should feel the issue too great, the battle too critical, the value of souls too vast, for our own interests or credit to be made much account of. Oh, it is a beautiful thing to see a man, heart and soul devoted, on fire with love for an object worthy of all his affections, to see him devoted to a pursuit which ennobles him, which brings out all his powers, which raises him in the scale of being. God grant, dear brethren, that this may be the case with us, that the life we now live we may live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us. May it be true of us, "To live is Christ." May we be able to say, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

THE END.

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